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Using the Internet for religion: a study of the possible use of the Internet for religious purposes among the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Mumbai, India

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Using the Internet for Religion

**A study of the possible use of the Internet for religious purposes among the Catholics of
the Archdiocese of Mumbai, India**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the

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Abstract

It has been claimed that the Internet is influencing not only ways of doing business and modes of communication and recreation, but also the ways human beings practice religion. Most studies undertaken on how people are using the web for their religious needs are done in North America, largely among Christians. This study was aimed at testing whether this was true of Catholic users of the Internet from the Archdiocese of Mumbai, India.

In order to verify the religious use of the Internet, focus groups were conducted among various sectors of Catholic users to explore whether differences in age, sex and religious groupings resulted in significant variations in net usage. The data obtained from the focus groups was further tested with a survey questionnaire, administered to a representative sampling of Catholics from the Archdiocese of Mumbai. The data provides not only general trends of net use among the Catholics, but also nuanced perceptions of the net in relationship to its religious use.

Research evidence indicated that the Internet was not being used for religion by the Catholics of Mumbai. The fact that there was an inclination towards and ambivalence to using the net shows that there are deeper issues that are influencing net usage. These issues could relate to the free-for-all style of the net and the authority-bound character of the Catholic faith; the interactive character of the net in contrast to the top-down style of communication of the Catholic church; and the global virtual community of the net in comparison with the tangible faith commitment to the local parish community in worship and practice. In conclusion hypotheses proposed to explain the poor usage of the Net are substantiated and new issues suggested, that require further research in the context of net use for religion.

Author's Declaration

I, Jude Botelho, hereby certify that all material in this thesis, which is not my own work, has been identified, and that no material has been previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

Fr. Jude Botelho

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Introduction

One cannot deny that the Internet is being used for more and more purposes by a greater number of people all over the world. It is used by students, teachers and researchers in pursuit of information and knowledge; by business and industry for commercial purposes; by governments for civic and administrative purposes; by medical doctors for diagnosis; by artists and art lovers for enjoyment, and people are constantly discovering more and more uses for the Internet in diverse spheres of life. The question then arises: could it also be used in the sphere of religion, which is an integral part of so many peoples lives?

The subject of this study is the possibility of using the Internet for religious purposes, in particular, this research was carried out to ascertain whether Catholics in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, India, are using the Internet for religion and if so how? Further, I wish to examine their usage patterns and perceptions of the role of the Internet in religion, as well as its implications for the policy of the Catholic Church towards the Internet. Related questions are: are people open to using the Internet for religious purposes; what do they expect and perceive as religious usage; and, what do they foresee if greater use is made of the Internet for religious purposes.

Context of Internet Research

One of the major issues related to the Internet appears to be the size and the social and geographical composition of the users. Not only has the number of users grown by leaps and bounds, but the young and the old, the rich and poor, male and female, urban as well

as their rural counterparts have, to a greater or lesser extent, been drawn to using the Internet for varied purposes. Though the spread of the net is not even, users from diverse sections of the world have taken to it. Other issues that have to be borne in mind when exploring Internet usage are the results that the Internet appears to have encouraged: wider information, newer communication patterns and sets of social relations. In particular, it transcends barriers of spatial and cultural differences. Almost daily, users are accessing and adding information to the web, using emails and Internet messaging services to get in touch, and joining online groups to satisfy their varied needs. Further repercussions of Internet use have been the extent to which Internet usage becomes a substitute for previous modes and patterns of communication or, on the contrary, a closely related addition; the extent to which it was a technology of freedom creating new free-form communities of interest, free from inherited and dominant institutional barriers and constraints or, on the contrary, whether the Internet reinforces previous patterns of control and inequality.

Internet and Religion: Issues and Questions

As a major and rapidly growing subfield of usage, the relationship between religion, its practice, experience and expression, and the Internet has attracted the attention of both researchers and religious practitioners. In recent years, some studies have been published on the topic and traditional as well as newer forms of religion have established their presence on the Internet. In relationship to this particular study, the official Catholic Church, through the 2002 Vatican Document 'Church and Internet' offered a positive policy, endorsing the use of the Internet for religious use. In exploring the use of the

Internet for religious purposes, in addition to the subset of general questions listed earlier, the issues and the specific questions that have to be researched are the following: Was the use of the Internet for religion an addition or a replacement for more traditional forms of religious information, experience, participation and practice? Was the use of the Internet for religion supporting or undermining traditional religious structures of authority and membership? Where all religions are equal, in so far as they use the Internet, was the Internet a universal medium with a universal, and by implication unicausal impact, or, on the contrary, did the relation and impact differ both, as between religions and, of particular relevance to this study, as between ethically or culturally differentiated subgroups within the members of Christian Churches, such as the Catholic Church?

In examining these issues in the context of the Catholic Church, a number of discrepancies between the church and the Internet come to the fore. While the Internet operates in a comparatively “rules-free” environment and has no centralized regulating authority, the Church is perceived as a highly regulatory body, with a central authority, which generally encourages conformity. Secondly, the net, by its very nature, invites and encourages interactivity, while the Church has traditionally used a one-way, top-down model of communication. The other allied issue that needs to be examined is whether the Internet, which encourages individualization through personalized web-pages, newsgroups, chat-groups, personal networks and online virtual communities, could be used for religious communications, because the Church is centred and focused on community, and its concrete expression is the physical, flesh-and-blood local Church.

Again, although Catholics believe in the Universal Catholic Church, in practice, believers are encouraged to express and live their faith in and through the local parish community. Would these factors be a hindrance to using the Internet for the practice and promotion of the Catholic faith?

Reasons for undertaking this research

For some time, the place of the Internet in everyday life has been one of the important issues of our day, gaining interest from people who are studying changing trends in society. Not enough studies have been done to posit the Internet in relationship to society, culture and religion in any significant way. The use of the Internet is growing in society, and information on the net is expanding to cover newer areas of human interest. Religion has the third highest number of websites on the net. The Barna Research group and the Pew Internet and American Life Project in the United States claim that an increasing number of people are using the Internet for their religious interests. Some researchers like Barna have even predicted that future church membership will drop as people access the Internet. (Barna Online Research 2001)

If Internet use for religious purposes is growing in Western countries, and particularly in North America, could the same also be said to be true of India? If the use of the Internet, as is claimed by recent studies, which we will examine later is influencing the practices of religion and religion itself, would the use of the Internet in India also influence the practice of religion, which is so much part of the Indian way of life? In particular, will it

influence the traditional practices of the Catholic faith, which are strictly adhered to by a fairly large number of its followers in India?

I shall test these claims by looking at the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Mumbai. I have chosen to situate the study in Mumbai, India, because of the claim often made for the Internet that it is essentially a global, rather than spatially or culturally located medium. The Catholic Church's leadership at the Vatican sees the Internet as a new means to promote the Catholic faith and recommends that every diocese should have a presence on the Internet. I aim to discover the extent to which the Catholic Church in Mumbai has implemented this proposal, and with what success. If it has not implemented this instruction, what is the reason for this, and what are its implications for Church policy. Hopefully, this research will add to that existing on the use of the Internet for religious purposes, in so far as it will provide insights from a Catholic and Asian perspective.

An overview of the study

Chapter 1. offers a brief overview of the Internet; its evolution, its popular uses, and people's perceptions of it. This chapter starts by reviewing the background of general Internet research, it examines the role of the Internet in creating an information society and new forms of communication, social contacts and community building, and their consequences and influence on society today. This chapter serves to clarify key issues that the substantive research project will address.

Chapter 2. examines the Internet in relation to Religion. It looks at how religion has entered into cyberspace and how it is used by internet fans, believers and official representatives of religions. The chapter also examines research on the Internet and religion and claims made about the influence of the Internet on religion. It also discusses the variety of possible religious uses and the problems they raise, both in general and for the Catholic Church in particular. The latter part of this chapter reviews the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Internet, situating it within the context of a wider history of the Church's policies towards the communication media, in relationship to its authority structure and its implementation. In particular, the chapter focuses on the Church's endorsement of the Internet and the Church's promotional efforts.

Chapter 3. Against this background this chapter goes on to focus on a case study of Catholics in Mumbai. It first reviews India's socio-economic and communication scenario, including the spread of the Internet. It then describes the focus group used for the research in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, by which I establish religious use, the reasons lying behind the use or non use, the attitude of Catholics, both lay and priest, to the use of the Internet for religious purposes in general, and for the Catholic Church in particular.

Chapter 4. deals with a second tool for the research, the survey questionnaire. This establishes broad patterns and trends in the religious use of the Internet and the perceptions and attitudes of its users. The findings present a definitive picture of the state of use/non-use of the Internet for religion in the Archdiocese of Mumbai.

Chapter 5 analyses the findings and the conclusions that can be drawn from the research conducted in Mumbai. It endeavours to arrive at answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this research; evaluates the problems related to the use of the Internet for religion and interprets the results of the research in terms of the assumptions and perceptions of users and non-users of the Internet that have influenced the present situation with regard to Internet use for religious purposes. It also proposes some hypotheses with regard to underlying issues that may explain the status quo. This would need further research to arrive at definitive conclusion. It concludes with insights gained through the research, about using the Internet for religion.

Chapter 1. The Internet and its influence on society and on India

Introduction

When the Internet first came upon the media scene it was hailed as one of the most astounding discoveries since the printing press and wild predictions were made about how it would influence humankind. The hype that surrounded it led to prophecies that it would change everybody's lives. Nicholas Negroponte began his book *Being Digital* with the following statements:

Early in the next millennium your right and left cuff links or earrings may communicate with each other by low orbiting satellites and have more computer power than your present PC. Your telephone won't ring indiscriminately, it will receive, sort and perhaps respond to your incoming calls like a well-trained English butler..... Twenty years from now, when you look out of a window, what you see may be five thousand miles and six time zones away....(Negroponte 1995:6-7).

These speculations have still to come true. Others predicted an apocalyptic time through the arrival of the computer and new technologies. The film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, managed to grip the public mind with the vision of the computer as a notorious monster that could take control of technology and bring about humanity's extinction. A lesser known film, *The Forbin Project*, set against the background of the cold war, envisioned the consequences of turning over the controls to very advanced 'intelligent' computers. Both films fired the popular imagination with the spectre of computers enslaving humanity and creating panic. However, with the personal desktops' appearance in the late 70s, and subsequent films, such as *2010*, *D.A.R.Y.L.* and *Blade Runner*, the apocalyptic scenario turned into a messianic one, where computers were now seen as serving and redeeming humankind (Lochhead:1997). Later films like *The Matrix*

encouraged people to see the Internet as a catalyst offering a mountaintop experience. “It offers the sense of meaning and the mystical jolt of religion without the drag of morality, discipleship, theology, and the Cross” (Veith & Stamper 2000: 21). There have been predictions at both ends of the spectrum. Some foresaw the sinister evil that the Internet would cause, others believed that the Internet was the greatest boon to humanity. Neither scenario has so far materialized, and probably neither will come true. Experience shows us that history usually has a way of levelling either extreme.

With the emergence of the Internet, people who use the net have been referred to as Netizens, indicating perhaps that a new type of citizen of the world has emerged with the dawn of the Internet. Michael and Ronda Hauben, in the preface of their book *Netizens*, distinguish two uses of the term:

The first is a broad use to refer to anyone who uses the Net for whatever purpose. Thus, the term Netizen has been prefixed in some uses with the adjective good or bad. The second use is closer to my understanding. This definition is used to describe people who care about Usenet and the bigger Net and work towards building the cooperative and collective nature which benefits the larger world. These are people who work towards developing the Net. In this second case, Netizen represents positive activity and no adjective need be used (1997: x).

With the use of the Internet, a new social institution has been developing and this in turn has given rise, not only to a new way of perceiving users and non-users of the Internet, but to the perception that the Internet itself is seen as having some influence in bringing about changes in society and innovations through the way we interact with one another. As the excitement grows about this new social institution, could the Internet be instrumental in changing the way we acquire knowledge, conduct our business, entertain

ourselves, maintain social contacts, congregate in communities and even participate in religious rituals and traditions? Before examining these issues it will be necessary to look at what constitutes the Internet.

In this chapter, the introductory section will examine what the Internet is, how it has evolved, how it relates to the World Wide Web, to cyberspace, its geography, and its growth. We also examine how people popularly perceive the Internet, who are its users, and what are the causes for the wide disparity in Internet use, leading to the digital divide. The next section will examine the ways in which the Internet can be said to be influencing society, especially in terms of availability of information, freedom of use and community building. The possible changes that the Internet is expected to bring about in society will also be looked at in relationship to religion.

Part I.

1. 1. The Internet: Its history, spread and use

1.1.1. Evolution of the Internet

The origins of the Internet are to be found in the ARPANET, a computer network set up by the Advanced Research Projects Agency in September 1969, by the Defence Department of the United States for mobilizing resources for military purposes. The idea was to design an interactive flexible computer network capable of surviving a nuclear attack. This network could be operated from any point through the invention of packet switching technology that broke down information into packets and sent them from one

computer to another, even if a large portion of the network was missing or not functioning. The network would therefore function efficiently with no central command or control point. This was called a distributed network.

The first nodes of this network were set up in 1969 at the University in California, LA; Stanford Research Institute; the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah, and by 1971 grew to fifteen nodes. The next step was to make the connection with other computer networks, so that it would become a network of networks. One reason for the widespread acceptance of the Internet's design was that a range of interest groups participated in its design. Although the design of the Internet came from the international researchers' community, the actual implementation was carried out under the auspices of the US military. To expand the network of networks, it needed a host protocol to provide reliable connections with the host computers that would compensate for transmission loss. The researchers, after consulting networking experts, reached an informal agreement on international standards to interconnect various systems, which came to be known as the TCP (Transmission Control Protocol). The TCP protocol was split into two separate parts: a host-to-host protocol (TCP) and an Internet protocol (IP).

After this agreement, steps were taken to segregate the military and academic users. Steps beneficial to both, as they would protect military research and data, and open the network to university research, facilitating the later transfer to civilian control. By February, 1990, ARPANET was obsolete and was decommissioned. The Internet was

released from its military environment and handed over to the universities. The next step was to commercialize Internet technology to make it attractive to future users. This gave a boost to the spread of the Internet protocol and made it the accepted protocol for networking (Abbate:2000).

The Internet today is a system of private and public computer networks that span the globe, interconnecting various databases by specialized links that enable access to information. These networks have grown from about 100 nodes in 1984, to millions by 2004. The story of the Internet's origin reveals the many forces that influenced its development. To a large extent, it owes its present setup to the US military, the creative networking of the researchers' community, the commonly agreed networking protocol, and also to its ruggedness and flexibility, which have made it appealing to military applications and civilian interests.

Perhaps the key to the Internet's later commercial success was that the project internalized the competitive forces of the market by bringing representatives of diverse interest groups together and allowing them to argue through design issues (Abbate: 2000:145).

1.1.2. Internet and the World Wide Web

What made it possible for the Internet to embrace the world at large was the World Wide Web, an information-sharing application, developed in 1990 by Tim Burners-Lee. The World Wide Web was a milestone in the evolution of the Internet into a mass medium: a medium of and for the people. Tim Berners-Lee, one of the designers of the World Wide Web, of which the Internet is a major part, says of the Web:

The web is more a social creation than a technical one. I designed it for a social effect – to help people work together – and not as a technical toy. The ultimate goal of the Web is to support and improve our web-like existence in the world..... What we believe, endorse, agree with and depend on is representable, and increasingly represented on the Web” (2000:133).

The World Wide Web could be compared to an indexing system for libraries that allows us to zero in on material for which we are looking, and quickly retrieve it. But it is also more than that because of hypertext linking, through which any word on a Web page can be highlighted, and the coding behind the page allows the creation of a link between that word or document, and any other document on the Web. This linking facility has given rise to what is called ‘surfing’ the Web, browsing through hundreds of possible links on it. To add to the thousands of Web pages, came the idea of preparing ‘personal home pages.’ Soon millions of users added their own personal information with links to popular Web sites.

What further popularised the Web was web-browser programmes like ‘Mosaic,’ and later ‘Netscape’ and ‘Internet Explorer’, that allowed people to navigate through this complicated maze of digitized information with the addition of colour, sound and movement. Today, the World Wide Web can be used both to receive information and to make it available to others. Hypertext and hyperlinks allow users, acting as receivers of information, to move seamlessly from one source of information to another, deciding for themselves which information they wish to retain and which information to bypass.

All these additions made the World Wide Web a global mass medium. Kevin Kelly notes:

In the first 1000 days of the web's life, several thousand webmasters created over 450,000 websites, thousands of virtual communities, and 150 million pages of intellectual property, primarily for free. And these proto-commercial sites were visited by 30 million people around the world, with 50 percent of them visiting daily, staying for an average of 10 minutes per day (1998:60).

From its earliest days, the most popular sites were the search services which sprang up and became valuable in surfing the Web. One of the problems with the wide resources available on the Web was the absence of an index, in the ordinary sense, but what it did have were search engines and catalogues, which helped to identify, locate and link the information found throughout the Web. Roland summarizing the potential of the World Wide Web says:

It is estimated that 1.5 million pages are being added every day and the number doubles every eight months. The Web, catalogued, indexed and fully searchable, has become a resource whose breadth, depth and value are almost beyond comprehension (1999:321)

1.1.3. Internet in Cyberspace

Through the Internet and the World Wide Web, people are journeying in what has been called cyberspace. They are transforming and being transformed by cyberspace. Cyberspace is not easy to conceptualize and there is neither a single unified representation of cyberspace, nor agreement of its major components. According to Brasher:

Cyberspace is a fiction of public etiquette that orients people in a virtual environment. An abstract idea with electronic components, cyberspace identifies the expanse, if not the time, where those communicating by means of computers believe and act as if they are. A partly communal "where" fantasy, cyberspace is the sum total of the millions of maps people draw on when online to determine where they are. Whatever it may be, cyberspace is our first global, virtual mall (2001:5).

Hamelink gives a graphic description of cyberspace while pointing out its dilemmas.

Cyberspace is geographically unlimited, non-physical space, in which -independent of time, distance or location, transactions take place between people, between computers and between people and computers. We participate in cyberspace when we surf on the web, but also when our personal data gets stored in a data bank, when we pay with a credit card, reserve a seat on a flight, or when neurologists make a three dimensional computer scan of our brains. It is important to know that there is no single cyberspace. There are cyberspaces. People live, love, play and work in multiple virtual spaces that are sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting (2000:9).

Cyberspace could be said to be the environment in which we use the new digital technologies as we access, use, transform and store information through the World Wide Web. The term “cyberspace” first used by Gibson (1984) appears to capture and portray the near-future developments of the Internet environment in one single word. While the Internet has come primarily to signify the technical infrastructure, the term cyberspace is widely used to describe the related content. People have popularly called this new mass medium cyberspace, the Internet, the Web or the World Wide Web, and for the purposes of this study we will use the terms interchangeably as popularly understood.

1.1.4. Perceptions of the Internet

Different people have different perceptions of the Internet. Some people see it as an exciting development with almost unfathomable opportunities and consequences for the world of the future. Others think it is sinister, frightening and even dangerous. A European Consumer Survey Report of 2000 surveyed more than 12,000 European citizens in 14 countries and highlighted European anxiety about the Internet: with ‘always-on’ Internet connections becoming more common in the European home, personal Internet security is more important than ever. The main part of this report looks

at how European consumers are worried about credit card and home-banking fraud, file theft, e-mail fraud and computer viruses (MarketResearch.com) (<http://www.marketresearch.com/product/display.asp?productID=769534&x>). As the experience of the net is open to vastly different interpretations influenced by one's personal experience, the context and the use of the Internet are inevitably equally diverse. Different cultures have their own way of perceiving and handling the concept of the Internet.

Kathleen O'Toole, in an online press release of the 2000 study on the Internet and Society, conducted by Stanford Institute for Quantitative Study of Society (SIQSS), giving the preliminary results of the first assessment of the social consequences of Internet use, stated:

As Internet use grows, Americans report they spend less time with friends and family, shopping in stores or watching television, and more time working for their employers at home - without cutting back their hours in the office" (http://www.stanford.edu/group/siqss/Press_Release/press_release.html).

Looking at the Internet from the standpoint of education, Warren Beatty's study of students' perception of the Internet indicates that a majority of the students perceive the Internet as a primary source of course information. However, students without convenient Internet access expressed lower levels of satisfaction than students with convenient access (<http://www.uwf.edu/iems/wab1.htm>). Carey Hoffman commenting on the University of Cincinnati's research on the impact of the Internet states that researchers Margolis and Resnick found that most people prefer to use it as consumers looking for entertainment, information and opportunities to socialize. Resnick's

conclusion was that the world has changed the Internet much more than the Internet has changed the world (<http://www.uc.edu/info-services/polinet.htm>).

In the UK, the results of the Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS) and the Omnibus Survey published online by Public Technology.Net concluded that

individuals use the Internet with varying degrees of sophistication from using it for the occasional email, signing up to friends reunited, to, as one commentator put it, allowing it to be 'a complete substitute for life'..... But not everyone is convinced of the benefits of the Internet. As reported 72 percent adults not already using the Internet do not think they will use it next year, 52 percent of adults not using the Internet reflected a general lack of interest in accessing it (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/IAOSlondon2002/contributed_papers/downloads/CP_Allin.doc).

1.1.5. E-mail, the most popular use of the Internet

The most popular application of the Internet is electronic mail, or e-mail, which allows users to send each other messages and to attach other information, such as files containing text or computer programmes. These messages can be sent between two users, or between one user and several others, e-mails can thus be used for private discussion groups where messages are sent to a number of users who have subscribed to the list. For many people today, e-mail has become synonymous with the Internet, it has become a vitally important Internet environment for net users, who now consider it to be an indispensable technology.

In 1992, only 2 percent of the American population used the e-mail service. In 1998 four trillion e-mails were sent in the US alone and that was representative of only 15 percent of the total population. The *Wall Street Journal* calculated that a typical worker in a

European company deals with some 150 e-mails a day (Watson and Hill, 2003:142). A sizeable majority of those who e-mail relatives say it has increased the level of communication between family members. Howard, Rainie and Jones, who studied the surveys conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, contend that the use of e-mail helps people build their social networks by extending and maintaining friend and family relationships.

Their surveys revealed that some 59 percent of those who use e-mail to communicate with their families communicate more often now with their primary family contact, and 60 percent of those who e-mail friends say the same thing about increased communication with their primary friend contact. About 31 percent of family e-mailers have started communicating with a family member that they had not contacted much before (Wellman & Haythornewaithe Ed., 2002: 67-68).

Cummings and Kraut hold that between 1995 and 1998, there was an almost 50 percent growth in the use of e-mail for personal relationships, whereas there was almost no growth in work-related use of e-mail (Cummings and Kraut, 2002). Many believe e-mail to be the most important breakthrough in human communications since the invention of the telephone. Nie, Hillygus and Erbring, studying Internet use, interpersonal relations and sociability in a Time Diary Study found that

There is also robust evidence that many people use and enjoy e-mail. The UCLA study, for instance reports that 76 percent of e-mail users report checking their e-mail at least once a day. In the Pew study 49 percent of Internet users report exchanging e-mail with family members at least once per week, and that 49 percent of e-mail users report that they would 'miss it a lot' if they no longer had e-mail available to them (Wellman & Hawthornewaithe, 2002:233).

The reasons offered for the use of e-mail are that e-mail reduces the costs and risks of written communication, is less committal than a letter and less personal than a phone call. A growing number of people prefer exchanging information or greetings by e-mail

rather than by phone as it is also easier when many time zones separate the users, making synchronous communication difficult. It also appears that people are motivated to send e-mail rather than letters, knowing that it will be received in a matter of minutes rather than days. In India, the most popular uses of the Internet are for e-mail purposes and for accessing information, as we shall see later.

1.1.6. Geographic spread of users of the Internet

While the Internet is global in extent, it is by no means a general medium of communication and the number of users of the Internet has grown so rapidly that it is not possible to give their exact number. In 1999 the total number of users worldwide was estimated to be around 150 to 180 million and was expected to rise to a billion by 2005. It is worth noting that such claims were made in spite of the slowdown in Internet growth towards the end of the last millennium. By the late 1990s, almost 99 percent of the Internet connections were in North America, Western Europe and Japan, with one percent being shared among the 4 billion people who made up the rest of the world. While the highest number of users is in the United States, the number in other areas is growing, the major growth area being in Europe. Slevin states:

Finland was the most wired country in the world with 35 percent of its population online. The United States had just 30 percent of its population accessing the Internet in 1999. Other countries with large online populations include Australia with 23 percent, Sweden with 30 percent, Switzerland with over 16 percent, the United Kingdom with over 15 percent, the Netherlands with 12 percent and Japan with over 7 percent of their populations online by 1999 (Slevin, 2000:41).

The NUA Internet surveys, touted as a leading resource for Internet trends and statistics, show a highly uneven distribution of the Internet in September 2000, both in terms of users and the penetration rate relative to population. North America, according to this

survey, with 161 million users was the dominant region of the world, and together with Europe's 105 million users constituted the bulk of the 378 million. The Asia Pacific region, with over two-thirds of the world population, accounted for only 90 million users, or about 23.6 percent of the total. Latin America had only 15 million users, the Middle East had 2.4 million and Africa had 3.11 million users, of whom the majority was in South Africa (NUA Surveys: 2000).

The situation of Internet growth is more complex for developing countries, partly because data are scarce, where they exist, however, percentages often obscure absolute numbers. China has only 2% of its population online, but that is more than 26 million users. India's 0.5 percent nevertheless amounts to five million users. But the fact remains that in developing countries a large number of people is not connected to the Internet, has no interest in being connected or cannot afford it, or has no infrastructure to enable it. NUA Internet Surveys admits that the figures even today are not accurate.

The art of estimating how many are online throughout the world is an inexact one at best. Surveys abound, using all sorts of measurement parameters. However, from observing many of the published surveys over the recent years, here is an 'educated guess' as to how many are online worldwide as of September 2002. And the number is 605.60 million. (NUA 2002).

The detailed breakdown shows the changes that have come about in the past two years. Europe leads with a growing number of 190.91 million, Asia Pacific has 187.24 million, (of which India at the end of 2001 had 6.31 million), America and Canada have 182.67 million, Latin America has 33.35 million, and Africa has 6.31 million (http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/) (NUA Surveys: 2002).

1.1.7. Users of the Internet and where they use it

Due to the high concentration of users in the United States much of the data available about types of users are largely about the United States. U.S. and Canadian users appear to be evenly split between men and women, but with a higher number of users who are, young, white, urban, with higher incomes, with higher education levels, and more years of access (Nua:2001). The percentage of women users over 40, lower income earners and non-graduates has increased most in recent years. Studies by Anderson and Tracy on the impact of the Internet on everyday British life (Wellman and Haythornewaithe 2002) have found British users of retirement age to be heavy users, and Nie and Erbring (2000) also report that retired users spend nearly two hours more a week using the Internet than non-retired users. New Internet users proportionately have a higher number of females, and in recent years, females are more frequent users than males. New Internet users are older than the average of users reported in surveys. However the percentage of those 65 years and older who are using the Internet is still small. For users who started in 1992 or before, the proportion of non-graduates was 28 percent, rising to 67 percent for the 1999/2000 group. Over the years, the percentage of graduates has risen from 48 to 56 percent (Wellman et al.: 2002).

Reporting on the latest UK Web access pattern, the National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2003 in PublicTechnology.net states

Individuals were asked where they had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview. A wide range of locations was reported with the respondent's own home being the most popular location (82 per cent), followed by their workplace (46 per cent) and another person's home (23 per cent). Other notable locations were people's

place of education (14 per cent), public libraries (10 per cent) and Internet cafes or shops (six per cent). (<http://www.publictechnology.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=380>).

1.1.8 The Digital Divide

The ‘digital divide’ originally denoted unequal access to the Internet because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, education, income, geographic location, English-speaking ability, and lack of infra-structure. The expansion of the term ‘digital divide’ to ‘global digital divide’ points to difference in Internet access and use between countries, as well as within countries. Differences in the use of the Internet are cultural as well as technological and commercial. These have led to unequal distribution of information and communication sources. The differences in availability of access are not the full story.

As Castells notes:

“Differences in Internet access between countries and regions in the planet at large are so considerable that they actually modify the meaning of the digital divide, and the kind of issue to be discussed”(Castells:2001:248).

There are substantial differences in Internet use between countries, as well as between cities and regions within countries.

The digital divide is not only a matter of differences in access to the Internet service providers, broadband, and reliable electric and communication systems, but it is a matter of who gets to use the net, under what circumstances, for what purposes, and how this use affects other social activities. Having access to a computer and having the ability to use the Internet effectively, are two different things. Factors that are influencing the use of the Internet include price, quality, bandwidth, computer skills and online content. In

particular, developing countries have large segments of their populations whose poverty and lack of literacy make Internet access unfeasible, besides which rural or impoverished urban areas are without electricity and telephone connections. Cost is another crucial factor in Third World countries, because Internet charges are expensive for most people in developing countries. Content is another factor that influences Internet usage. At present, the Internet is heavily biased towards those who know and are conversant with English.

Most Internet content targets well-off, well-educated English -speaking users. An estimated 78 percent of all websites are in the English language, even though just over 50 percent of the Internet users are native English speakers and only 10 percent of the world population use English as a first language (Wellman and Haythornewaithe 2002:79)

Other factors that hamper the growth of the Internet are lack of equipment, lack of autonomy of use because of location of equipment, lack of computing skills, lack of social support for using the Internet. There are many Internet users who have dropped out because of frustration with cost, content or technology. Still other factors that have to be considered in the differences in Internet usage are country specific Internet regulations and practices. Today, there still exist countries under dictatorships and political regimes which ban the use of the Internet as subversive, or who exercise strict censorship of the content of material accessed through the Internet. All these issues further complicate the digital divide.

Part II

1.2. The Internet and its influence today

The question that concerns us here is whether or not Internet use is influencing or transforming society today, and if so in what ways. The areas are touched upon as possible avenues of development and change. The relatively low cost of using the Internet and interconnectivity have resulted in easy access to information and the resultant information society. Interconnectivity and greater interaction between users of the Internet, have led to a decline of centralized control, whether economic or political, less censorship of the mass media, and consequent freedom of use. Next, the use of the Internet has led to the death of distance, as people increasingly and routinely interact with people next door as well as with people all over the world, with consequent new forms of social contact emerging. Using the Internet has occasioned new ways of establishing communities free from spatial constraints such as territorial limits and nation states. There could be other areas of possible change but those mentioned above are highlighted, because this study will focus on the possible use of the Internet for religious purposes and these areas could have special relevance, as will be seen later, in the context of religion and the Catholic Church, which will be the focus of this research.

1.2.1 The Internet: ease of access and abundance of Information

The sheer number of growing websites, as well as the diversity of sources available on the Internet, has produced vast amounts of information which can be considered only as the raw material of knowledge. Related to the abundance of information available on the

web are the problems of information excess and information verification. Excess information is information beyond that which is desired, needed or required by the user, leading to non-productive processing of information. Information is offered that is not what users are looking for, or information is made available that cannot be meaningfully handled or used. Basically, information is expected to be factual, as data that have been interpreted, linked together or transformed to reveal underlying meaning.

If, on the one hand, the Internet has the advantage of accessibility to information from anywhere in the world, on the other hand, it is difficult to verify or assess the credibility of the sources of information. The factual truth of the information available on the Web is always under suspicion, unless it is a faithful reproduction of verified information already existing in print. Although the Web can, and does, contain some of the best writing and research from a number of disciplines, there is no authority that judges, vouches and accredits their value. An added problem is that, unlike a library archive, the Web can change its representation while appearing to be as it was before, as websites can be updated and amended regularly. Instead of providing a singular authoritative source of information, the Web provides multiple unverifiable sources of information.

Burnett and Marshall suggest that

Web information as raw material functions differently in our present culture than previous information sources. The Web has constructed a free relationship to its sources and surfing the Web is an expression of both the access to its burgeoning content and a representation of liberation from structures and patterns of past institutions and past media forms (2003:33).

In the past, if one wished to publish information, this was done through agreed upon procedures and followed norms set up by publishing standards and enforced by institutions of learning and civic authorities. This was mainly to authenticate the information published and establish its credibility, and legitimacy. It also provided safeguards for the author and publisher, while at the same time making them accountable to society. With the coming of the Internet, information can be freely published by who ever wishes to do so, without reference to sources, because there is no regulating authority for web publication, no enforcing of copyright laws and the impermanent nature of web sources makes it almost impossible to keep track of, or authenticate, its contents.

1.2.2. Towards an information society

The information society is a broad concept which has been in use since the 1970s to refer to a wide range of social and economic changes, linked to the growing influence of information technology as we understand it today. In its broadest sense, it points to the role that information technology plays in the way individuals live, work and entertain themselves. The *Social Science Encyclopedia* suggests that,

The use of the term 'Information society' has now become so widespread that the concept cannot be understood as a reference to any specific thesis. Journalists, futurists and social scientists often use this term to denote a more information-centric society in the same vein as others use such concepts as information economy, the wired nation, the communication revolution, the micro-electronic revolution and the knowledge society (2002: 410).

Daniel Bell (1973), who focused on forecasting the post-industrial society, posited information as the defining technology of the post second-World War era, while raw

materials were the core requirement of the agricultural society and energy was the core technology of the industrial society. Bell identified major trends in the Information Society, namely the growth of employment in information-related work and the rise of business and industry tied to production, transmission and analysis of information. The most significant trend he suggested would be the shift in the majority of the labour force from agriculture and manufacturing to services, and information work becoming central to every sector of the economy, including agriculture and manufacturing.

If the industrial society is defined by the quality of goods as marking a standard of living, the post-industrial society is defined by the quality of life as measured by the services and amenities –health, education, recreation and the arts -which are now deemed desirable and possible for everyone (1973:127).

The second trend Bell identified, was the increasing importance of knowledge to the management of social and economic institutions. “What has become decisive for society is the new centrality of *theoretical* knowledge, the primacy of theory over empiricism, and the codification of knowledge into abstract systems of symbols that can be translated into different and varied circumstances.” (1973:343). A third set of trends would involve power shifts, particularly the growing prominence of a professional and managerial class –knowledge workers. “If the dominant figures of the past hundred years have been the entrepreneur, the businessman, and the industrial executive, the “new men” are the scientists, the mathematicians, the economists, and the engineers of the new intellectual technology (1973:344).

Despite all the hype about the information society, there remains no consensus on a definition of “information society” or whether we are in fact living in an increasingly information-oriented society.

1.2.3 Towards a knowledge society

Information could be said to be one of the ingredients of knowledge. Knowledge however is derived from information that has been synthesized through inference or deduction into meaning or understanding that was not previously known. The knowledge society, according to Peter Drucker, can be characterized as follows: (i) Borderlessness, because knowledge travels even more effortlessly than money. (ii) Upward mobility, available to everyone through easily acquired formal education. (iii) The potential for failure as well as success. Anyone can acquire the 'means of production' ie., the knowledge required for the job, but not everyone can win (2002).

According to Kalam and Pillai

Knowledge society has the following distinct characteristics: (i) It uses knowledge through all its constituents and endeavours to empower and enrich its people. (ii) It uses knowledge as a powerful tool to drive societal change. (iii) It is a learning society committed to innovation. (iv) It has the capacity to generate, absorb, disseminate and protect knowledge and also to use it to create economic wealth and social good for all its constituents (2004:149).

Kalam and Pillai also believe that, while the information society worked through networking, connectivity and software products, a future knowledge society would work through the efficient utilization of existing knowledge. A knowledge-based society, implies that society is tending to use more and more knowledge for more and more of its dealings and transactions, not only in the area of communications but also in commerce and economics. It, however, does not imply that members of present-day society are more knowledgeable and intelligent than those who did not, and do not, have multiple sources of information on the Web available to them. Wurman believes that the greatest

crisis facing modern civilization is going to be how to transform information into structured knowledge (1998).

1.3. The Internet interconnectivity and interactivity

1.3.1 Internet and Freedom

When the Internet was created, one of the hopes was that it would foreshadow a new age of freedom in which governments could do little to control communication. Another attraction of the Internet was that an unlimited number of people could interact with others in an unfettered way, and their privacy seemed to be protected by the anonymity of the Internet and by the seeming difficulty of tracking the sources and identifying the content of messages using Internet protocols. The freedom of the Internet seemed to derive from both technological and institutional grounds. Technologically, the architecture of the Internet had been designed precisely so that it could bypass blockages at any point. Institutionally, since the Internet was first developed in the United States, it came under the constitutional protection of free speech, which is enforced by US courts (Burnett and Marshall:2003). The only way to control net users was to restrict their uses of the Internet, and this is happening in certain countries e.g., China, Cuba, Singapore, Vietnam, Myanmar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, that have imposed restrictions on net users (Kalathil and Boas: 2003). In a sense, the Internet, because of its openness, undermines national sovereignty and state control and Governments have tried to regain control over the Internet through legal means. Since

free flow of information is central to the use of the Internet, there have been ongoing struggles to gain monopoly and to keep access and use of the Internet as free as possible.

Being aware of its vast potential and outreach, industry and political heavyweights have tried to control, manipulate, and dictate the rules of Internet operation, but so far have not succeeded either in gaining monopoly, or in imposing boundaries and sanctions on users. There have been debates and discussions about the tools for surfing the net, governance and control of net procedures and obtaining one's domain on the net. These technical and organizational aspects of how the Internet has maintained its open structure will not be examined here, as they do not relate directly to the study of using the net for religion. But the question of whether the unrestricted use of the Internet makes it a proper tool for religious purposes will be pursued further.

1.3.2 Restrictions in using the Internet

People have used the Internet for every conceivable purpose, from the sublime to the mundane, from the rational to the ridiculous, from the theoretical to basic down-to-earth applications, from the sacred to the profane. The Internet appears to invite human beings to utilize its potential in traditional as well as novel ways. While there are some who fear the Internet is being used for destructive and harmful purposes and thus advocate censorship and restriction of freedom, the majority of cyberspace users wish to have the Internet as the final bastion of freedom, where nothing and no one is excluded, where the rules of the game are self-imposed and where even the technology that makes the Internet function is freely available and not the monopoly of any particular industry. As

Zuboff noted of information processes more generally, “the informing power of the Internet sets knowledge and authority on a collision course (1988:310). The question then arises, is there a limit to this freedom of the Internet? Should there be some control exercised, or should the net be unrestricted and unfettered?

As a consequence of the openness of the Internet, people have used it for constructive and creative purposes as well as for questionable, deviant and anti-social uses. While people applaud and approve of websites that promote human endeavours, there is a growing number of issues that highlight the question of restriction and control of the use of the Internet. Since the Internet operates beyond geographical and political boundaries of nations and states, there is the question of sovereignty and security. In this context, there is the phenomenon of terrorism, that is assuming alarming proportions and is being carried out with the help of the Internet. Adding to this insecurity there are sites that give instructions on how to manufacture bombs and other weapons of destruction.

Furthermore, there are individuals and organizations that use the Internet to promote hate campaigns against individuals and communities on the basis of race, creed and religion, that threaten freedom of belief and other basic human rights. There are still other websites that promote inhuman behaviour and practices, like cannibalism, that last year drew public attention in Germany. In addition, there are yet other sites that use the Internet to provide pornography and prostitution and questionable moral practices like child-prostitution, surrogate motherhood and rent-a-womb services.

1.3.3. Content Regulation and Censorship

In the face of all these abuses of freedom, the media, especially the Internet, have been blamed for the erosion of decency in society. Changing moral values and the rise of the Web have combined to make obscenity more pervasive, and also to making it and easier for children to access. From a legal perspective, defining “obscene material” is problematic and often inconsistent. This becomes even more problematic with the net, which goes beyond national boundaries to nations which may have different moral standards. Moral issues have been turned into ‘moral panic’ by politicians, religious leaders and community spokesmen.

In the US, efforts have been made to restrict the freedom of the Internet.

In 1996 the US Congress passes the Communication Decency Act, which makes it a crime to send obscene or indecent messages over the Internet to anyone under 18.

In 1997 the US Supreme court struck down the Act, calling it too vague and broad.

In 1998 the US Congress passed the Child Online Protection Act. The law targets ‘material that is harmful to minors’ and applies only to World Wide Web sites, not e-mail or chat rooms.

In 2000 US appeals court strikes down the act, objecting to its reliance on ‘community standards’

In 2001 US Supreme Court rules that using community standards to identify ‘material that is harmful to minors’ does not, by itself, make the statute too broad for First Amendment purposes. Source: Biskupic 2002 (Burnett and Marshall, 2003:150).

These successive efforts at controlling the net highlight a number of formidable obstacles: first, the means of exercising censorship on the net; second, arriving at any definition of ‘decency’ that can win a consensus; third, controlling indecency across frontiers; and fourth, persuading other nations to introduce similar legislation. It would

thus seem that attempts by the state to control the Internet by traditional means of censorship appear to have failed to curb the freedom of the Internet. However, countries, like China, Cuba, Vietnam and Myanmar, especially those with repressive regimes, have tried to curb the freedom of the Internet by controlling and monitoring Internet Service Providers, or by the outright banning of Internet use. Yet their efforts are not altogether successful (Kalathil and Boas: 2003).

1.3.4 Surveillance and Technological Control

The liberty of the net has continued to be challenged constantly by upgraded surveillance technology and stricter regulations. Lawrence Lessig, in his book *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (1999), proposes that, by using specialized technologies, privacy can be breached and once individuals can be related to specific communication processes in specific institutional contexts, traditional forms of political and institutional control can be exercised. The need to secure and identify communications on the net to make money, and the need to protect intellectual property rights, have led to the development of new software codes that make it possible to control computer communication. Lessig suggests that the violation of liberty and privacy on the Internet is a direct result of its commercialization. Lessig's reasoning would appear to appeal to both governments and business, as is evident from applications for control that intertwine the interests of commerce and governments. These are technologies of identification, of surveillance and of investigation, which include the use of passwords, 'cookies'-digital markers, and identification procedures. Surveillance technologies place

markers that allow tracking of information and monitoring activity around the clock. Technologies of investigation refer to the building of databases of information for surveillance and storage of routinely recorded information. These technologies operate well under two basic conditions. First, the controller knows the codes of the network and the controlled does not. Secondly, controls are exercised on the basis of a access provided on the network, around an Internet Service Provider, or the intra-network in a company or institution. Though the Internet is global, when filters are placed on points of access, gateways, and firewalls local access can be monitored and controlled.

The freedom of the Internet has long been a matter of concern, on the one hand for people in authority, who were worried about websites that preached and promoted political and racial hatred or provided pornography and, on the other hand, for those fearful of governments' desire to censor network exchange. Some have argued that the key to networking systems is not freedom but surveillance. Although people still imagine the Internet as being free from control, in practice there is a growing number of curbs especially in workplaces. Programmes can display on a server all internet activities taking place in an organization subscribing to the server. "In the United States, 92 percent of websites collect personal data from their users, and process them according to commercial interests" (Lessig, 1999:153). Side by side with Internet companies and industries, governments spend billions of dollars in the name of national security and the war against global terrorism, to step up their own surveillance programmes with new technological sophistication that can read every e-mail, scan every document and eavesdrop on all electronic conversation carried on by individuals and institutions. Yet,

from time to time, there are breaches in Internet security as hackers break through firewalls, passwords are stolen, political activists take over websites, confidential information is boldly accessed and electronic security left in tatters. Hackers and crackers reveal the powerlessness of policing the net. As newer security measures are put in place, the end result may be that the Internet, instead of being a space of freedom, will become a heavily controlled environment.

Having looked at restrictions that are being imposed on the use of the Internet, it is questionable whether the Internet operates in an environment of freedom as claimed. In terms of usage, there are restrictions with regard to protocol and existing norms of practice. The possibility of using the Internet for subversive, anti-social activities or against the accepted norms of morality, has increased the surveillance by governments and by the use of technology, all of which has considerably restricted the freedom, or rather licence, that some seek on the Internet. Authoritarian regimes openly control net use, but countries with a democratic setup also exercise similar controls in unobtrusive ways. Hence, it can be said that there is restricted freedom on the net and it would seem that restrictions are increasing as the Internet's potential for a variety of uses increases.

1.4. Internet and Democracy

1.4.1 Democracy and the public forum

In ancient Athens, the *agora* was a public forum, the place where free citizens assembled and debated matters of public interest; where public opinion was created and

asserted and decision-making was exercised, functions that we today associate with democracy. If the availability and efficiency of the means of communication are important elements in the realization of a democracy, and if, in the Internet, we have such means of communication, then we could say that the Internet does put within our grasp a fairly good precondition for democracy. Today, such public fora as the agora no longer exist, but the concept remains and it would appear that the media provide this public forum function but, with the takeover and the privatization of large media institutions, concern has been expressed by those working to preserve democratic institutions that the broadcast media are turning what was supposed to be an agora into a market place for commodities, rather than a market place for ideas and debate. However, Internet enthusiasts claim, with some justification, that the new and expanding form of the agora is the Internet. It is supposed to be the open space in which public discourse can be conducted without the mediation of those in authority and without the gate-keeping and agenda- setting of the mass media. Citizens speak to citizens across geographical and political borders. Some governments are worried about the freedom of access to information which the Internet allows. Lin Hai, a Chinese Internet user who distributed 30,000 e-mail addresses to a democratic magazine in the US, was jailed in 1999 for crimes against the state. His imprisonment could be seen as a warning to those who believe that the Internet can be valuable for democracy (Watson and Hill:142)

Proponents of the Internet point out the advantages of the Internet, over other forms of communication, in fostering democracy. The decentralized, many-to-many, potentially interactive architecture sets the Internet apart from broadcasting and print-media in its

potential for democratic self-organization. Gordon Graham, in his book *The Internet*, points out some advantages of the Internet for democratic purposes. E-mail is attractive to many because it combines the benefits of telephone, letter and fax without many of the corresponding disadvantages. E-mail would seem to be particularly advantageous for group communication and group consultations, which are seen as integral to democracy. While there are many personal, educational and commercial advantages that can be derived from group communication, the formation and maintenance of political parties, lobbies and interest groups are advantageous for the democratic setup. With e-mail the public debate can thus now be made with less expense, and without the risk of personal inconvenience, that hindered many from being involved in any form of political participation.

Besides e-mail, we have web-pages which provide another forum for participation and expression of one's views and opinions in the public arena. Even though there is a multiplicity of public radio and television channels, access is not readily available to the majority of the public. By contrast, there would be easier access to the Internet available to individuals and groups with limited time, resources and skills, who can avail themselves of the technology of the Internet and can literally present themselves and their viewpoints to the world (Graham:1999). These advantages may be available to large sections of the North American population; the same is not true for most of the populations of Asia and Africa. If the power of the people depends on the technology of the Internet, then this democratic potential maybe a long way off for most of the world's people.

1.4.2. Democracy and public information

A new term, 'tele-democracy,' has been coined to suggest that tele-communications would advance democracy by extending and widening access to information; by counteracting, through computers and modems, the advantage of the information-rich over the information-poor. It is claimed that local computer networks have the potential to link up, nationally and internationally, offering access to individuals and communities.

As evidence of teledemocracy the work of such alliances as PeaceNet, founded in San Francisco in 1986, Econet, London's GreenNet and the computer-communications project Public Data Access (PDA) is cited..... Sceptics, however, hold to the view that in an age when information has become increasingly commoditized, it is the all-powerful agencies of information – governments, multinational corporations - who control the 'electronic highways.' And that such highways are less public and free and increasingly private and subject to tolls. (Watson and Hill, 2003:287-288)

If tele-democracy were to work, then there should be a closer link between electorates and governments, encouraging greater participation and interactivity through consultations. Writing online of the abundance of information available in an era of converged media in *The Nation*, Andrew Shapiro observes,

the problem is not scarcity of space but the opposite: an overabundance of space-and content- which creates scarcity of attention. In other words, the good stuff will be out there, but with so many competing sources it will be difficult to get anyone to know about it, let alone listen," (The Nation, 6 June,1998) (<http://past.thenation.com/issue/980608/0608shapiro.shtml>).

1.4.3. Democracy and space for counterculture

Another form of democracy that has found favour today, is the existence of a counter-culture, a type of subculture, antagonistic to the dominant or prevailing culture. In a democracy there should be space for dissenting voices. A favoured communication device of contemporary counter-culture is the Internet. However, experience has shown that while the Internet may be important, it is not sufficient for successful activism. Kalathil and Boas (2003), in studying the impact of the Internet on authoritarian rule, point out as an example the size and the success of the Free Burma Campaign, which, although it achieved a heightened global awareness of the Burmese Government's abuses and a reduction in foreign trade with that country, did not achieve any tangible political change there. Watson and Hill point that:

Through the net the like-minded people can bond, plan, and organize most famously focussing on organized protests wherever the nations of the World Trade Organization meet, such as in Seattle, London, Prague or Genoa; and by their protests commanding global media attention (2003:67)

1.4.4. Democracy and a better informed public

For democracy to flourish one of the requisites is a better informed citizenship that can participate intelligently in matters of popular debate and public concern. If the Internet provides citizens with more and diverse sources of information, then it could enhance the democratic fibre of a nation. How far have the media succeeded or failed to provide information for citizenship? Writing in *The European Journal of Communication*, Peter Golding suggests that we live in a media society, in which information is available at a price or not at all and that a more accurate term for today would be the misinformed

society. Wherever we look, in coverage of race, industrial relations, welfare, foreign relations or electoral politics, the media have failed democracy (Golding:1994)

For Golding, the 'information age' has not meant that the message systems have made it possible for information to reach the common man and woman but, rather, it has created gigantic media monopolies and a society that has become increasingly centralized in terms of decision-making. He sees the current flow of information as 'fragmenting rather than unifying society, furthering not equality but inequality.,' hence they are not contributing to the democratic setup (Ibid:1994). Though Golding is referring to the mass media in general, the same could perhaps also be said of the Internet in which multinationals, commercial enterprises and governments vie for greater control and greater presence on the Internet.

Michael Howard, in his online article 'The Internet and Democracy', while admitting that initially the Internet held possibilities of democratizing communication, wonders if the promises are not utopian. The possibility of broadband connection, which would evidently be more available to the information rich than the information poor, could further undermine the democratic possibilities of the Internet. Howard sees the danger that portals will offer high speed to high paying commercial customers, and low speed to the poorer individual and non-profit organization. He proposes that what can prevent the transformation of the Internet into a corporate-dominated market place would be the establishment of appropriate regulations. He sees the Centre of Digital Democracy's *Broadband Bill of Rights* as a useful beginning for the maintenance of the basic, open,

democratic, non-discriminatory character of the net. He suggests ten principles to maintain the basic, open, democratic, non-discriminatory character of the Internet:

choice of service providers, non-discrimination concerning content, extension of privacy rights to all interactive media, open systems, interoperability, public interest obligations, civic content, educational opportunity, children's programming and overcoming the digital divide (<http://www.geonewsletter.org/idem503.htm>)..

In looking at the arguments that the Internet is conducive to democracy, they seem to rest on the following premises: that the Internet can be a means of discussion about issues that affect the public; that it is easily available to a very large number of people for the expression of their opinions on public matters, through e-mail and web-pages; and, it has the potential to offer all the information needed by the public for intelligent participation in issues that affect their lives. I would tend to question whether the Internet is really democratic because of the following factors. Firstly, while the usage of the Internet is growing exponentially, this growth is limited mainly to the United States, some parts of Europe and a few regions of Asia and Africa. In large democracies, like India, the population using the Internet is minimal. Secondly, looking at the *de facto* use of the Internet, the highest usage appears to be for communicating with people, and this is not necessarily information about public issues. Thirdly, while it is true that vast amounts of information are available on the Internet, these are more easily available to commercial and government concerns. Unorganized information is too vast to be intelligently used for public debate and discussion. Fourthly, while the users of traditional mass media like the print, radio and television can be more easily measured nation-wise or region-wise in terms of particular media messages, the mass of Internet surfers are diffused throughout the world and the number of 'hits' received by a

particular site may not convey an accurate picture of the extent of its popularity or of the use of a particular site or message. Fifthly, precisely because there are such a number of information sources available on the net, the effect could be that relevant information gets diffused and lost. Sixthly, research done on the effect of the Internet on authoritarian rules (Kalathil and Boas:2003) seems to indicate that the net has not promoted democracy, or influenced, in any major way, countries with repressive regimes. Optimism about the net may contribute to the perception that ending such dictatorial rule is a matter of wiring enough people, which is clearly not the case.

Technology alone cannot accomplish miracles, and the Internet has no inherent political value. It is only a tool and its specific use by political actors has to be carefully weighed and handled. In reality the use of the Internet may be a small factor in any democratic transition. The Internet may facilitate and assist traditional work in promoting democracy rather than playing a starring role (Kalathil and Boas, 2003:150-151).

For all these reasons, I would assume that seeing the Internet as a democratic tool is more an expectation of future possibilities rather than a present reality, although, as its usage spreads and as technology is refined, it may in the future be used for democratic purposes.

1.5. Internet enabling social participation/online communities

1.5.1. Internet and the death of distance

The 'Death of Distance' means that we can do more and more things without being physically present at the point of impact, and we can do these things cheaply. In the not

so distant past, people would think twice before making a long distant call precisely because of exorbitant costs. While the ideal form of communication preferred is still face to face communication, experience shows that newer, faster and cheaper forms of communication are becoming more and more accessible and many have started using these newer forms of communication, which are said to have caused the death of distance. This is seen especially in the field of industry where business is conducted routinely across geographical frontiers, and in the field of education, where distance education is coming into its own. Frances Cairncross, in *Death of Distance*, proposed that the most important consequence of the death of distance was going to be the way people think of geography in all the things they do. That it would be more important for people to know in what time zone somebody lived, rather than where they were physically located on the planet. That it would be more important to know whether there are good communications in their country than to know whether they are in a rich or poor country. This would alter the manner in which we think of physical distances, in all sorts of ways (2001).

New ideas will spread faster, leaping borders. Entire electorates will learn things that once only a few bureaucrats knew. Small companies will offer services that previously only giants could provide. Poor countries will have immediate access to information that was once restricted to the Industrial world and traveled only slowly, if at all, beyond it (2001:6).

Paul Delaney, in an online paper on 'Virtual Universities and the Death of Distance,' posted in 1996, in critiquing the death of distance, says:

In its broadest sense, the death of distance represents a globalizing process in the domain of information: the combination of the reduction of transportation costs with the removal of political barriers to international exchange. The death of distance

puts into question the postmodernist dialectic of center and periphery. There's a sense in which cyberspace has no center; and one of the rationales for extending the "Information Highway" around the globe is that it will level hierarchies based on geographic centers (<http://www.sfu.ca/delany/mla96/delany.html>).

In looking at the evolution of the Internet, while it is true to a certain extent that the Internet has led to an increase in the way people communicate across distances, yet the preferred level of communication continues to be face-to-face interaction in strategic centres. Cairncross, herself in the second edition of *Death of Distance* retreated from her earlier argument that geography would become almost irrelevant. Vital transactions, like summit conferences and contract signing, are still conducted face to face, after preparation through communications at a distance. In the world of learning, real universities are still preferred to virtual ones. If one goes to Silicon Valley, one can find there, clustered together, lots of companies that are involved in the death of distance but prefer to work next door to each other in the same physical space. In conclusion, it could be said that while, on the one hand, we don't need to know locations while interacting on the net and that distances do not matter on the net, we are, on the other hand still constrained by physical locations, and it will be some time before we are at home with virtual spaces.

1.5.2. Internet and social contact

In the study *The Internet in Everyday Life*, (Wellman and Haythornewaith 2003) undertaken in the United States, it has been found that the Internet is being used most popularly for contacting people, and that this is done, not only on a one-to-one basis, but also by reaching people in groups, in what have come to be known as "online" or

“virtual” communities. One factor that increases the possibility of such group contacts is new technology which provides more and more interactivity, thus making social interaction reflexive and open-ended. These possibilities challenge individuals and institutions to create new possibilities for meeting others, once restricted to sharing a common locale. As people began to use the Internet more and more frequently, there are two diverse trends said to be the result of Internet usage: increased social contact and just the opposite, a decrease in social contact. It was also claimed that Internet use would replace other forms of social contacts and that it would lead to the building of a new form of community, online communities or virtual communities. These questions need to be probed because they could directly affect religious uses of the Internet.

1.5.3. Internet and Social Interactions: Two Schools of thought

In the early days of the Internet, there were predictions that the use of the Internet would stifle and curb direct social interactions by Net users. In the Information Age Series ‘*The Internet in Everyday Life*, Katz and Rice list many proponents of this pessimistic viewpoint: Baudrillard, 1983; Gerden, 1991; Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire, 1994; Nunes, 1995; Stoll 1995; Turkle, 1996. (Wellman and Haythornwaithe 2002:123).

The first school of thought holds that computer mediated communication technology is too inherently antithetical to the nature of human life for meaningful human relationships to form, (Stoll, 1995).So much posturing, ‘gender-switching’ and faking of identities can take place that it is extremely difficult for any real friendships to be created and maintained (Turkle,1996) (Wellman and Haythornwaithe 2002:124).

The second school of thought, holding the opposite view, sees the Internet as a medium of social interaction. Examples given to support this view are the news-groups, interest and hobbies groups, Internet relay chats, multi-user dungeons, object oriented multi-user games and even online dating services. The growth of Web-based chat rooms and instant messaging offering 'community,' would seem to support the idea that the Internet enhances community living. This second view is optimistic, suggesting that cyberspace involvement can create alternative communities that are as valuable as our familiar, physically located communities. (Rheingold: 1993).

Manuel Castells highlights the results of researchers in two studies:

Residents of Netville who were users of the Internet were found to have a higher number of strong social ties, within the suburb and outside the suburb than those without Internet connection. Internet use strengthened social relationships both at a distance and at a local level for strong and weak ties, for instrumental and emotional purposes as well as for social participation in the community (2001:122-123).

However, Castells also reports that other studies showed rather negative results. In the U.S., two panel studies are often cited as evidence of the isolating effect of the Internet: A Stanford University on-line survey of 4,000 users, conducted by Nie and Erdring (2000), and the highly publicized Pittsburgh study, conducted by Kraut et al.(1998), pointed to the negative impact of the Internet.

Nie and Erdring observed a pattern of declining person-to-person interaction and loss of social environment among heavy users of the Internet, while reporting that for the majority of users there was no significant change in their lives. Kraut et al. in a carefully designed panel study of a sample of 169 families found that greater use of the Internet was associated with decline in the participants' communication with family members in the household, a decline in the size of the social circle and an increase in their desperation and loneliness (Castells, 2001:122-123).

Researchers have not arrived at any common interpretation of this contrasting data. It would seem that there are some indications that, under certain circumstances, the Internet may act as a substitute for other social activities, but as studies are still being conducted, it is difficult to arrive at any definitive conclusion on the effects of the Internet on the socialization process.

1.5.4. Social Interactions and the Network Society

When we talk of the Web, we are speaking of a Network, which has been defined by Van Dijk simply as “a connection between at least three elements, points or units” (1999:28) Communication networks link diverse points or units in order to facilitate the process of distribution of content and information to the widest possible audience. We are aware of different kinds of networks like telephone networks, radio networks, television networks that have been in existence for some time. In *The Network Society*, Van Dijk says that:

the basic elements of the networked society are not so much networks themselves but individuals, households, groups and organizations linked by these networks. Increasingly they shape the form and organization, rather than the contents of modern society (1999:24).

In his book, *The Information Age* (1998), Manuel Castells contends that there is a fundamental shift taking place globally. Whereas in the past, society was referred to as an industrial society, today a network society is replacing it. A network society has a social structure built on networks. Castells believes that the information network is a salient feature of our society today. Whether today's society is a network society can be

questioned. In fact Van Dijk does not go so far as Castells in claiming that the networks themselves have become the basic units of society. It is true that media networks are gradually replacing or complementing social networks of face to face communication.

However:

while shaping the mode of organization and the important structures of society they are not the whole substance of society. Society still consists of individuals, of people, of groups and organizations. However, modern society is in a process of becoming a network society (1999:220).

Burnett and Marshall (2003) point out that the network society has developed because of the movements of information needed for large scale interconnected organizations to operate. This, in turn, has produced shifted patterns of employment and consumption. Organizations and individuals participate increasingly in making and reading the websites which increase the flow of this information network. The Web has become an expression of the value of the network society.

Elaborating on the various types of information networks, Castells points out the emergence of a new system of social relationships, centred on the individual or 'me-centred' networks. These "me-centred" networks are sustained by the new patterns of urbanization which fragment the spatial context of livelihood (2001:125-133). The growing distance between citizens and the state fosters individual withdrawal from the public sphere. Consequently Castells maintains that the new pattern of sociability in our societies is characterized by networked individualism. Increasingly, people are organized not just in social networks, but in computer-mediated social networks. These "me-centred" networks have been called 'personalized communities.' Peoples patterns

of sociability have evolved towards a core of sociability built around the nuclear family in the household, from where networks of selected ties were built according to interests and values of the individual. Lorne Dawson points out some of the characteristics of these networks or personalized communities:

People tended to have a far greater range of social relationships than in the past and over greater distances. Ties are weaker and more flexible, yet they are an important source of social support, stimulation and material advantage. In fact, people tend to be involved in a series of networks of relations formed on different bases for different durations and at different levels of intensity. These networks either overlap or are totally divergent, happen simultaneously or serially. The sole common denominator is the individual at the hub of each network (2004:82).

The question needs to be asked: Have these networks replaced communities? Scholars have yet to answer this question, as Web networks are still evolving.

1.5.5. Conceptualizing Community

Before examining the possibilities of a virtual community and the influence of the Internet on existing communities, the constituting elements of a community need to be examined. Benedict Anderson calls social organizations, like a state, an ‘imagined’ community. He sets out four criteria by which modern communities can be described as ‘imagined.’

First, members of an imagined community will never know most of their fellow members and will never meet, ‘yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’ Second, they are imagined as limited in that even the largest community is finite and has boundaries beyond which lie other communities. Third, these communities are imagined to be sovereign and the members dream of being free from the interference from outsiders. Fourthly, these communities are imagined because regardless of inequalities and exploitation that may prevail among their members, they are always conceived as exhibiting ‘a deep horizontal comradeship’(1983:6-7).

Community then has a variety of meanings from a community of people in the same physical locale, to people who live maybe thousands of miles apart, but belong to the same country; to individuals from different nations within an organization, who rarely meet face to face but who are successfully engaged in online collaborative work. They would all claim to be communities, and yet they are all different forms of community.

In the twenty-first century, while traditional neighbourhood communities may be breaking up because of the demands of present-day living, there appears to be a renewed interest in community, but the concept of community itself has changed. While longing for a sense of community, there is a realization that we cannot go back to past forms which no longer exist. We still continue to have our membership in states and nations, but with diminished or weakened loyalties. While communities of the past had at least one common feature, namely being in the same space and time, newer communities find they cannot bond for these very reasons. Giddens suggests that what can maintain a community is “being in an intelligent relationship....which means living along with others in a way that respects their autonomy” (1994:130).

How does the Internet affect both community in general and an online community? Although there have been concerns about the decline of community, the rise of the Internet has increased these fears, as well as creating hopes for a new type of community. Modern communication technologies, such as the Internet, are opening up opportunities for new forms of human association. Researchers, like Rheingold, have debated the possible influence of the Internet on community and have suggested that the

use of the Internet increases, decreases or transforms community. These modern communities are not necessarily tied down to space and time but to a communicative or interactive space that brings people together. Perhaps these new communities demand new ways of thinking, conceptualizing and understanding community today.

1.5.6. The Virtual Community

Preece provides a working definition of an online community encompassing people, purpose, policies and computer systems.

Online communities consist of *People* who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles as leading or moderating. They have a shared *purpose*, such as an interest, need, information exchange, or service that provides a reason for that community. [They have] *Policies*, in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules, and laws that guide people's interactions. [They have] *Computer systems*, to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness (2000:10).

The Internet has been hailed as the new age of free communication and personal fulfillment in virtual communities built around computer mediated communications. Barlow states: "We are now creating a space in which people of the planet can have a [new] kind of communication relationship: I want to be able to completely interact with the consciousness that's trying to communicate with me" (Barlow,1995:40). Howard Rheingold, considered one of the first authorities on the Internet community, argues for a new form of community, bringing people on-line around shared values and interests, and creating ties of support and friendship that could also extend to face-to-face interaction. He proposes that:

Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough with sufficient feeling to form Webs of potential relationships in cyberspace” (1993:5)

Rheingold describes these communities in somewhat traditional terms:

People in virtual communities use words on screen to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk...In short they do just about everything people do in real life (1993:3).

Whilst Rheingold’s starting point was to look at virtual communities from the traditional community experience, others have felt the need to look differently at these virtual communities, if they are to be properly understood. Instead of thinking that these new forms of community will replace older communities, we need to examine in what ways these new forms are affecting, enhancing or complementing existing forms of communities.

1.5.7. Virtual Communities and Physical communities

Initially, research, such as Rheingold’s, concentrated on examining the behaviour of net users who visited virtual communities as a new form of communication created by the Internet, but newer studies prefer to locate virtual communities as yet another form of socializing practiced by users, who do not give up traditional forms of communication but use the old and the new together. Rather than asking whether people will give up their traditional communities while joining Internet communities, researchers like James Slevin, think it might be more useful to find out

what is it about our modern condition that motivates so many millions of individuals and organizations to participate in forming newer forms of social relationships via

the Internet or intranets? Will the rise of 'virtual communities' mean that 'real' communities are on their way out, or will 'real' communities be transformed and endowed with a new lease of life (2000:92).

From research done since the 1990s, it would appear that while virtual communities have not replaced existing communities, they were being formed for specific goals as support groups. Their rise may have been occasioned by factors like urbanization, weak links to existing communities and the need to keep up weak social ties through whatever means available. Yet another trend in the evolution of social relationships is the rise of individualism in all its manifestations. Could virtual communities meet the need for a personalized community? Castells thinks that the Internet provides support for networked individualism. Individuals build their networks on-line and off-line, on the basis of their interests, values, affinities and projects. When these online networks are stabilized by regular usage they can build communities, virtual communities, different from physical communities. Castells indicates that studies done by Steve Jones and his colleagues show that:

most on-line virtual communities are ephemeral communities, and they rarely articulate on-line interaction with physical interaction. They are better understood as networks of sociability, with variable geometry and changing composition, according to the changing interests of social actors and to the shape of the network itself. To a large extent, the theme around which the on-line network is constructed defines its participants (2001:130).

Chen, Boase and Wellman, in a study comparing Internet users and uses around the world, found that frequent users of the Internet tend to use it in multiple ways, socially, instrumentally and recreationally, and combine it with face-to-face and telephone

contact. Moreover, they tend to have a positive sense of online community with friends and family. The researchers feel that:

Evidence from many studies in this book suggests that the Internet may be modestly increasing interaction with friends and relatives at a distance, has mixed local effects, and maybe diverting people from household interactions. The Internet can be leading people away from in-person and telephone encounters, and it can substitute for them. It can even increase other forms of contact by intensifying relationships and facilitating meeting arrangements (Wellman and Haythornewai the 2002:82).

It would appear, then, from the data studied that the Internet is important for people's social contact and socializing needs, yet it is not the dominant way in which people communicate with friends and relatives, both far and near. Telephone contact is still more frequent than Internet contact. People still prefer face-to-face contact with nearby friends and family. When frequency of Internet use is increasing today, it means people communicate more not less. The more people have telephone and face-to-face contacts, the more they have e-mail contact. Similarly, the more people feel the need for physical communities, the more they also search for online communities. In brief, both types of communities, online virtual groups and traditional physical communities, appear to coexist and do not necessarily eliminate or threaten one another.

1.6. Areas of net influence in relationship to religion/Catholic Church

In the previous section, an attempt was made to examine the possible areas of influence of the Internet and their consequences. In this section, the same areas of influence are looked at in relationship to the Catholic Church, on which this study will focus. While

the background for the study was provided by the previous section, this section tries to situate the areas of change in the context of religion, questions that arise and their implications, while considering the use of the Internet for religious purposes. These questions are highlighted here and will be further considered in the light of the data provided by the research.

1.6.1 Information accessed on the Net and religious information

Religion can be conceived as a way of experiencing God and relating to him. We express our belief in terms of our experience of God, what we believe about him, and what consequences this has on the values we uphold, attitudes we adopt and activities we undertake. Religion is related to knowledge received from God and through various intermediary sources. In so far as the Internet makes vast amounts of information available and accessible to human beings, could it be said to provide us with information and knowledge of God? Would religious information lead to knowledge of God? One could have read all the treatises on God and yet not be a religious person. On the other hand a person with no rational knowledge of God but faith can be a religious person. The religious information that we receive and acquire has to lead to faith that transforms our relationship with God and with human beings.

Further, religion is concerned with truth and therefore the sources of knowledge and information need to be credible. When God is the source of our knowledge, his revelation is credible, but in so far as his message and teaching are communicated

through mediated sources, their credibility would depend on the media used. In this context, how does religious information accessed or received through the net measure up? If the sources of information on the net are multiple, can they be credible sources of religious knowledge? Can the Internet be considered a credible medium for communicating the doctrine and teaching of religion? These are questions that need to be kept in mind when the Internet is looked at as an information-rich medium available to us. In the context of religion, we will need to examine later whether religious information available on the World Wide Web creates religious knowledge and greater religiosity, or merely a multiplicity of information of religious data. The question of the Internet influencing information or knowledge in any way has therefore provided us with a useful background against which to situate the study of the use of the Internet for religious purposes and, in particular, the case study of the use of the Internet for religious purposes in the Archdiocese of Mumbai.

1.6.2. Freedom in using the Net and religious freedom

If the Internet is a 'free for all' tool, would it be suitable for using it for religious purposes? Almost all religions appear to lay down some basic rules and code of conduct, which are enforced by their religious authorities. But the Internet seems to be operating with the minimum of rules, and the ease of uploading information onto the Internet would appear to encourage users to upload whatever they wish. Would the use of the Internet by the Catholic Church challenge its authority? Could the Church, while using the net, permit the exercise of freedom, while at the same time exercising control in any

way? Examining the issue of freedom of use of the Internet has provided a suitable background for the research interest of this study

1.6.3. The Net as a democratic tool and its use in a hierarchic Church

Viewed in the context of using the Internet for religious purposes, this debate about its democratic possibilities could have its repercussions. Most traditional religions e.g., Christianity and to some extent Judaism, and Islam, are highly centralized, and have been non-democratic, in the sense that they are not run by majority decisions but by the dictates of lawfully constituted authority. If the Internet belongs to the people, if it has been created by the people and for the people, how can it be used for religious uses, which are not necessarily created by the people? Observing in particular, the Catholic Church, with which this particular study is concerned, the Catholic Church is seen as a highly structured, centralized, hierarchically organized body. Will the use of the Net for religious purposes affect the way the Church operates? Can the Internet be used for religion governed by rules and regulations which cannot be changed by popular demand? This preliminary section has provided some background to the democratic nature of the Internet, which will be further examined in looking at the ways the net has been and can be, used for religious purposes and people's perception of ways in which the Church may be influenced by the use of the Internet.

1.6.4. Social participation via the Net and participation in Church

This question of the Internet and social participation is important to this study as it intends to look at the use of the Internet for religious purposes. Religions encourage their

followers to express their religious commitment in and through their religious groups. While looking at the Catholic Church, it would seem to encourage its members to belong to a local church and parish community, at the same time being part of the universal Catholic Church. On the other hand, the Internet operates beyond national and international boundaries, and people using the Internet appear to be building relationships with individuals and groups different to traditional communities. The questions that arise are: Can the Church use the Internet to build up the Christian community? Would the use of the Internet hinder or help Christian community? Would the use of the Internet change the way the Catholic religion is lived in the existing, and possible new, communities of the future?

1.6.5. Joining online groups and belonging to a Church Community

The concept of a network society will have to be reexamined in the context of religion and especially the Catholic faith and its use of the Internet. While believers in the catholic faith, are encouraged to express their commitment to a concrete physical unit of the church, in and through their local parish community, they are at the same time aware that they belong to the universal church, spread throughout the world. Catholics are very much aware of the global outreach of the church, and are proud of their membership in this all-embracing church. The question that will be examined later will be whether the church is a network society, created by the sharing of religious information and a linkage of all its diverse groups, or does its existence go beyond these pragmatic needs? Secondly, if the Internet is creating “me-centred” networks, functioning around

individuals and their communication requirements, does the Church operate in a similar fashion and are these “me-centred” networks compatible with a church network that is God-centred?

1.6.6. The Net and the Digital Divide

It is evident that though the Internet has continued to spread across various continents, this development has been uneven and its promised benefits have been reaped only by a small section of wealthy, educated, largely male-dominated, young people. The Catholic faith seeks to be open to all the world's people and, in keeping with the teachings of Christ, it has made a preferential option for the poor of society. It has sought to be the voice of the voiceless and has preferred to work with the marginalized and the under privileged in society. If the Internet favours only the elite, if it can be afforded only by the rich and the educated, can the Church use the Internet effectively for any religious purpose which discriminates against a large portion of its membership? Will the use of the Internet by the Church militate against its stand on behalf of the poor? Will the use of the Internet for religious purposes widen the digital divide that already exists among users and non-users of the Net?

Conclusion

The preceding analysis of the Internet, with its presumed or actual influences on its users and ramifications for communities and society at large, has provided a background for the study and it poses a number of questions about the religious use of the Internet. These can be summarized as follows: (i) As the Internet is seen to be enhancing an information society, the question can be asked: Is religion mainly information about the divine, or can the sharing of religious information deepen one's faith and enhance religiosity? In the context of transmitting religious knowledge, sources are considered crucial for credibility. How do multiple and unauthenticated sources measure up for religious content? (ii) The Internet has been said to enhance freedom and democracy, though in a limited way. How can the hierarchic and law-orientated Catholic Church use a communication technology that rejects all control while advocating unfettered individual freedom? In what sense could the church use a means of communication that seems to encourage unrestrained freedom? Could the Internet which appears to encourage people's participation and interaction find space in the present day setup of the church? (iii) The Internet has been seen as a gigantic network, creating a network society which can be tailored to one's individual needs. Can the church, which also networks with churches all over the globe, utilize a networking system, supported by the Internet, which is inward looking and 'me-centred'? In like manner, the Internet has been seen to promote new forms of community building through on-line and virtual communities. Would the church that is committed to local parish communities be threatened or supported by these new forms of communities, which are an offshoot of

the Internet? (iv) Lastly, in so far as the Internet is said to cause a 'digital divide' which could increase the gap between the haves and the have-nots, it can be asked: Should the church use it as a means of communication that favours only some sections of society? In the course of this study, which will examine people's use and perceptions of the Internet, it is hoped that the research will elucidate some answers.

Chapter 2. Religion/ the Catholic Church and the Internet

Introduction

This Chapter is divided into three main parts. The first section of the first part looks at various approaches that have been used in undertaking research on religion on the net. This is followed by a literature review of research carried out on religion on the net, followed by research on the Church and the Internet. The next section deals with specific researches conducted in the United States of America and Trinidad on religion on the Internet. This section concludes with some factual data about religious websites as they appear on the Internet. The second part of the Chapter deals with the Catholic Church and the media. First, it examines why the church is interested in communication and how it has used communication. Next, it examines the church's attitude towards the challenges it has faced from different forms of communication, its policy as contained in its documents and action undertaken in the implementation of its policy. Thirdly, it deals with the church and the Internet. The two recent documents on the net are examined to discover the church's stance on the Internet, and the section concludes with examples of how the church has used websites for religious purposes.

Part I

2.1 Existing research/studies on Religion and the Internet

2.1.1 The phenomenon of Religion on the Net

Interest in religion is becoming more widespread on the net, the proof of which is the growth and variety of websites on the net. There have been different approaches to studying religion on the Internet. Some, like Jeff Zaleski (1997) in *The Soul of Cyberspace*, have taken an observational approach, identifying various religions, old and new, that have appeared on the Internet and analysing the effect of the use of the net on religion. Zaleski was one of the first studies that asserted that religion is widely represented and that almost all religions have their websites on the Internet. Zaleski combines an analysis of websites of some religions with interviews with webmasters and users. In interviewing webmasters of religious websites and experts in online technology, he is able to reflect on how specific religions are being transformed online and also show insights into the phenomenon of online religion.

Brenda Brasher (2001), following a similar approach in *Give Me that Online Religion*, points out that religious websites are put there not merely by fans or fanatics, but by officials or committed followers. Evidence of a religious wave sweeping the net is the increasing number of traditional, as well as new, religions that are almost daily appearing on the net. Brasher, analysing electronic faith, contends that

online religion is a crucial contemporary cultural outlet for our meaning heritage from the past.....the wisdom Web pages and holy hyperlinks that are the stuff of

online religion possess the potential to make a unique contribution to global fellowship in the frequently volatile area of inter-religious understanding (2001:6).

The net is apparently meeting the need of a new generation of users who wish to combine the time they spent on the net with also meeting their spiritual needs. Chama's article, 'Finding God on the Web', highlights the fact that, side by side with business and commerce, religion is not only one of the fastest growing topics on the net, but is likely to change our notion of God.

It seems, religious groups are rushing online, setting up church home pages, broadcasting dogma and establishing theological newsgroups, bulletin boards and chat room." He goes on to point out the possible consequences of this "astonishing act of technological and intellectual mainstreaming that is changing the character of the Internet, and could even change our ideas about God....Interconnected, we may begin to find God in places we never imagined (Time 16-12-1996).

Evan Levy, writing in *Time* (13-5-2002), supports Chama in that young people seem to be asking deeper questions about the meaning of life and are finding answers in such new places as the web, radio and the movies. He also points out that the number of hits by young people on sites that blend religion with music, could point to a revival of religion expressed through music. Lavinia Byrne (2002), B.B.C. religion broadcaster and correspondent for *The Tablet*, points out that, after pornography and health, religion is the third largest topic people accessed on the Internet. Baker writing on 'finding God online' has a similar point of view to Byrne.

People talk about sex being a major use [of the Internet] and commerce being a major use, but religion is right up there... with official and unofficial sites of every world religion and every major denomination, sect or movement within those religions, from Promise Keepers to neopagans (2000) (<http://www.zdnet.com/yil/content/mag/9804/godonline.html>).

Katie Dean, in *Wired News* (18-1-2001), was of the opinion that “in this fast-paced digital age a basic church Web page was not enough.” She points to Pastor Preston Mitchell, of fellowshipchurch.com, who felt urged to

- market the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. God created the Internet –he is the one who gave us the ability as human beings to do that. We have the responsibility to use what God’s created to reach people.” (http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,41229,00.html?tw=wn_story_page_prev2).

Brasher (2001) and Beckerlegge (2001) add that in addition to traditional religions, new and popular religions are beginning to appear as people seem to feel at ease in expressing their religiosity on the net. Since more and more areas of human life, like business, education and culture, are represented on the Internet, it would seem natural that religion which is part of human life and culture, should also appear on the Net (Brasher:2001).

2.1.2 Ways of using the Internet for religion

The Net could be used for presenting religion in a variety of ways, by information about religion; religious teaching; a resource for the study of religion; as a means of recruiting individuals and propagating religion. Beckerlegge, makes the point that:

at its simplest level, the Internet can act as a notice board for religious organizations. Times of services and other meetings can be posted on the Internet. Sikhs can visit a website to discover the *hukamnama*; the verse for the day, taken randomly from the sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, housed in the Golden Temple at Amritsar (<http://sikhnet.com/>). Muslims can sign on for a global service that will signal the times of prayer on their mobile phones.... The website ‘Maven: The Jewish Portal’ similarly offers a range of services to the Jewish community. (<http://www.patelshopcorner.com/>)” (2001:225-226)

Traditional Muslims, heralded by the muezzin, turn towards Mecca for their daily prayers, accompanied by sacred movements. Nowadays, they do not need to live within earshot of their mosques to hear that call, they can consult any number of printed and electronic prayer-times guides, including several on the web. Zaleski points out that

The net is a powerful proselytizing tool, however, and Islam is a religion that thrives on conversion. Further, because Islam posits no intermediaries between the individual and God, it seems well suited to expand within the ahierarchical Net. Although fundamentalist Islamic groups are nearly absent from cyberspace, more flexible Islamic groups –some equally traditional, some not –have moved online in force (1997:56).

Zaleski's contention that fundamentalist groups are nearly absent from cyberspace can be questioned in the light of the 9/11 terrorist attack and the spurt of rabid Islamic websites that have appeared on the net. Brasher highlights creation of a new mode of religious expression. Her research offers a tour of websites; cyber pilgrimages, virtual shrines and rituals in cyberspace, meeting the needs especially of younger people, offering novel forms like electronic prayer, and reflections for people who can't use traditional forms, or as a forum for dissenting voices (2001). The attraction of the Internet, as a medium for intensely personal reflection, is borne out by the extent to which people have found that the Internet can facilitate prayer and intercession at 'Prayer net' offered by Church Net UK at <http://www.churchnet.org.uk/prayer/>. Premier Christian Radio maintains a website where individuals may talk about their emotional and spiritual problems in the context of prayer and spiritual direction. (<http://www.premier.org.uk/engine.cfm?i=11>). Zaleski (1997) points out that traditional religions have found new ways to inform and propagate their message, ways which are often different to the traditional means used by these religions.

2.1.3 Effects of using the Internet for religion

There are new forms of presenting religion on the net which may have positive or negative effects. This may cause tension between holding onto traditional ways of expressing and practising religion, and the use of newer and creative ways, in keeping with the culture of the Internet. Zaleski (1997), in particular, points out that authority-based religions would be most affected as the net could corrode authority. Religion would change from being something which is beyond manipulation and control, to something tailored to one's individual's needs (Brasher: 2001). Religion on the net, instead of building the community and being an expression of a community of believers, could lead to disintegration of the community and be an individual's expression of faith (Beckerlegge:2001). While technology can be used to create newer and more relevant and meaningful expressions of religion, one of the dangers is that it might gradually replace traditional religion (Beckerlegge:2001).

Nancy S. Armstrong et al. (2001), in an online article, 'Computer Savvy', on computer and online use by the Church, do a brief evaluation of the contribution the net has made to religion. The question raised is whether the Internet and its 'Virtual Church' are undermining the traditional congregational life of the church. Two recent studies, quoted in this article, suggest that this is not the case. Instead, the authors point out that the vast congregations using and experimenting with the Internet are not promoting aberrations of Christian life, but are enhancing traditional ministries: worship, fellowship, pastoral care, education, and community outreach. They suggest that most congregations were

using computer technology for administration, pastoral care, worship, community outreach, evangelization and communication.

Whether or not churches will or should use computer technology is no longer the question. The real question is how congregations can best use these technologies to enhance their communities and missions. (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_5_118/ai_70979352).

2.1.4 Should Religion be on the Internet/ Spirituality of the Net

Brasher (2001) feels that religion has a rightful and proper place on the net and religious websites should be encouraged. Religion has an important part to play on the net and proof of this is its vitality there. “This book is not neutral about religion. Its central thesis is that religious expression in cyberspace should be protected and supported” (2001:10). Brasher contends that religious people and religions make a valuable and rich contribution to society and religious tradition offers a ‘rich, incomparable meaning resource-necessary ballast to individual identity’ (2001:11). Further, Brasher proposes that “online religion is crucial to and positive for the future of religion. It is a vital cultural vehicle necessary for the emergence of religious experience and expression relevant to a future society.”(2001:11) Brasher believes her book “not only documents and analyzes the phenomenon of online religion but also argues for its public reservation as an integral part of our global future” (2001:11).

A new argument brought forward by some authors is that religion should be on the net because the Internet has spirituality and it can be a sacred space for the divine, and so religions should feel at home on the web. Zaleski, in particular, believes that cyberspace

has a soul and it can be sacred space. However, he admits that this would depend on what we make of it. He argues that:

just as our souls become what we make of them so will the soul of cyberspace mirror us in our entirety, including our soul...If in the days to come we attend to the sacred, then the soul of cyberspace, though beset by human frailty, will be a sacred one,..(1997:281).

Far from desacralizing religion and humanity, the net has the potential for the sacred, and users of the net should be aware of the net's potential for the sacred (Hammerman:2000). Rabbi Joshua Hammerman also points out how using the Internet has provided him, and his Jewish congregation, with new experiences of God and the divine in cyberspace.

Speaking of approaches to religious research in computer mediated communication in *Mediating Religion* (Mitchell and Marriage: 20 03), Heidi Campbell categorizes one approach as a philosophical/theological one, exemplified by Margaret Wertheim and Jennifer Cobb. In *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace* Wertheim, a science historian, explores the historic development of conceptions of space. She argues that cyberspace revives a medieval understanding of physical and spiritual space, in which the immaterial soul was created.

Whether or not the champions of cyberspace are formal religious believers, again and again we find in their discussions of the digital domain a 'religious valorization' of this realm... This projection of essentially religious dreams into cyberspace is not, particularly surprising. As a new immaterial space, cyberspace makes an almost irresistible target for such longings (Wertheim, 1999:254).

Jennifer Cobb (1998), in *Cybergrace*, proposes that whilst traditionally, science and religion were never expected to go hand in hand, the experience of surfers and her own

personal experience showed that there is a spirituality emerging, as proposed earlier in *The Divine Milieu*, by Teilhard de Chardin (1965), in his cosmic vision of the evolving spiritual world. Cobb further posits that machines may be conduits of a deeper spirituality. Charles Henderson suggests that the experience of surfing the Internet could be a new metaphor for God (Henderson:2000). As the Internet grows bigger and bigger, it appears to be taking on a new identity as a force people cannot fully comprehend or control. Henderson (2000) borrows this idea from Sherry Turkle (1995), who proposed that in every age the idea of God arose from the common experience of that age. If the Internet appears to be the modern metaphor for God, then it is a God different to the one traditional images have offered. Henderson (2000) further suggests that the God of the Internet is a 'connected' God.

2.2. Church on the Internet

2.2.1 Advocates for the church on the Internet

Many authors have written very positively about using the Internet for Christianity. These authors welcome the fact that the Church is on the Internet and, if it is not yet there, they propose that it should be. Dixon (1997), Wilson (1999), Wilson (2000), Jewell (2002) and Bjorvand (2002) write from a pastoral viewpoint, as an encouragement for the church ministers to enter into the Internet ministry. They believe that the net is compatible with the church, and they feel that the net provides a powerful tool for outreach and evangelization. Dixon in *Cyberchurch, Christianity and the Internet*, visualizes the Internet as a place of opportunity and challenge for the church,

and sees the Internet as a “God-given means of proclamation and explanation.” Further stating that: “The Internet world needs cyberchurch, not as a substitute for local church, but as a vibrant electronic expression of the life found in the body of Christ worldwide” (Dixon, 1997:162). Wilson (1999) proposes that Christian evangelization and the changed situation of our present day world demand that the Church use these new means to minister to people who are at home with the Internet. The Internet was changing the idea of evangelization itself, from preaching to relating with others. Wilson holds that the Gospel should be spoken in the language and culture of the people. The new media can be used as an expression of people’s religiosity, as a means to share religious information and knowledge and as a means of transforming the secular environment. (1999). In *The Internet Church*, Wilson envisions the Internet for world evangelism. “We have been called to claim this technology for the cause of Christ. To use it for His glory, to build His kingdom, to make disciples from every tribe and every nation. He is here with us in this moment of history, this information age, equipping us and empowering us for the creation of the Internet Church”(2000:120).

Jewell (2002), in *New Tools for a New Century*, believes that the ministry of the church is a mission that has been carried out by the church for centuries. However, it has to be adapted and offered in ways that are appropriate to the times. The Internet can be seen as a new tool for a new age, and technology will influence the way Christians teach, preach and worship in the Church. Since all these authors are convinced that the Internet is the way in which the church should evangelize, the approach is pastoral and instructional, so that new users and especially the church’s ministers, may learn how to plan their

strategy for putting the church on the Internet. (Wilson L:1999, Wilson W: 2000, Bjorvand:2002 and Jewell:2000).

Pierre Babin and Angela Ann Zukowski's book *The Gospel in Cyberspace* (2002), appears to be the only study by representatives of the Catholic Church. It has a different viewpoint and style in comparison to the others. The authors do not aggressively promote the Internet, but they do have a positive outlook towards the Internet and believe that the Church has a meaningful role to play in cyberspace. Examining peoples attitude towards the new media, particularly the Internet, Zukowski questions how the Church will evangelize within the new information landscape. She proposes that:

the community of faith needs to be alert to how believers and non-believers are being influenced and reshaped by the media landscape. This is especially important as more people spend a quantity of time in cyberspace. While our traditional means of communicating faith remain valid, they are not exclusive. The Internet offers new or additional opportunities to image and position the Good News within a growing matrix of religious and spiritual realities in cyberspace (2002:7).

Zukowski and Babin hold that faith can be nourished through the Internet, which is more inclined towards dialogue and networking with others. They point out that "the main turning point of evangelization in the twenty-first century will be this: it will depend less on the proclamation of our truths than on our ability to turn ourselves towards others. In conversation with others the Gospel will appear" (2003:69). The book's dialogic style of presentation tries to blend new technologies and the gospel message, traditional theology and the New Age. The common thread that holds diverse points together is the belief in God's presence in human beings as they venture into cyberspace.

2.2.2 Advocates for Internet for Church's ministry and pastoral needs

While the previously mentioned authors pointed out the compatibility of the Internet with the church's ministry, Andrew Careaga, (2001) in *eMinistry*, goes a step further and proposes that the church needs to utilize the net for its specialized ministries. This is especially true for young people, whose world revolves around the Internet. Careaga points out that the church has yet to realize the significance of the Internet and how it is changing society, especially among the young. The church cannot hope to engage the young unless it understands, and is conversant with, the culture of the Internet in which the youth are totally at home. Consequently, if the church does not use the Internet it risks being able to reach only the 'once-churched' instead of the 'never-churched.' In his introduction to *eMinistry* (2001) Careaga pointedly quotes the futurist Tom Sine, who in *Mustard Seed Versus McWorld* notes the hunger for spirituality throughout the Western world, but laments that the church appears to be oblivious to this hunger.

We are living in a world changing at blinding speed," he writes, "yet in our homes, churches, and Christian colleges we unconsciously prepare our young to live and serve God in the world in which we grew up instead of the world of the third millennium. Don't we have a responsibility to prepare our young to live in tomorrow's world? (Quoted in Careaga, 2001:23).

Careaga writes on the advantages of the web in nurturing a relationship and converting friends rather than people. Gary Soulsman, in an online journal article 'Teens connect with faith on the web' (9-12-2003), suggests that spiritual interests are alive and well for America's 32 million teens –especially over the Internet. Surveys in the U.S. point out that not only Christian but also Muslim youth, use the net for their faith needs and there

seems to be a significant interest in spirituality among the young wired generation. The net seems to be the preferred means of talking about their faith and pop culture (<http://www.delawareonline.com/newsjournal/life/2003/09/12teenconnectwit.html>).

Michael L. Keene (1999), in another article on 'The Church on the Web', proposed that the web appears to play an important and rapidly growing role in helping lay people think about their faith. For the first time, lay people who did not exhibit an active interest in their faith are now surfing the web for religious information for their personal education as well as for their work and ministry in the church. He felt that besides offering quick and easily accessible sources of religious information, the web is also offering help in building community by assisting like-minded believers connect to one another (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_22_116/ai_55670898).

Richard Thieme, in his article 'The Day the Computer Prayed' in the Goethe Institute Online discussion forum (1999), looks at one specific activity of religion, namely prayer. He holds that the Internet is being used increasingly to enhance and alter one of the oldest and most intimate activities of human beings, prayer. People are visiting the net to seek and to offer prayer in ways never done before. He feels that the net is a unique tool in so far as it allows strangers from different regions and cultures to connect in prayer. Thieme believes that the computer can pray, though he admits that there will be resistance to prayers on a computer, as if they are somehow 'not real'.

Anyone who has reached out on-line during a crisis, however, as I did recently when my brother was deeply depressed and threatened suicide, knows that the words that

show up on the computer in the middle of the night are words of light and life. Some of these people prayed and communicated their prayer via email. Some lighted simulated candles in the digital darkness, no less candescent for being words or images. Some typed advice or encouragement. And some, like those monks that turn that codex, plugged in our names to programs they had written and let computers just keep praying for us, day after day (<http://www.goethe.de/br/sap/macumba/thiemesth.htm>).

2.2.3 Critics of Internet use by Church

While many authors and writers of the books and articles about the church and the Internet endorse and recommend the usage of the net for religion, some other authors, while accepting that the Church can use the Internet, warn about the wholehearted usage of the net for religion. Lockhead (1988,1997), Groothuis (1999) Schultze (1996, 2000, 2000) and Cork (2002) evaluate and critique the use of the Internet for religion. All four discuss the Internet and its interface with religion from a theological perspective, though Groothuis and Schultze also look at the sociological implications.

David Lochhead (1997) writes as a theologian and, from a technological viewpoint, as a user of the first Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) on the net. He expresses a strong commitment to his own faith as well as an interest in other faiths. In *Shifting Realities*, he examines deeper issues involved and explores the possible consequences of the interaction between the Internet and religion: Can the computer be a God-machine, can the Internet, which is a store house of information data, be used to spread God's word? Can a tool that spawns pornography be used to deepen faith? Lochhead juxtaposes faith with information obtained on the Internet:

The world is created through God's word. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. The sacraments are the visible words of God. Proclamation of the Word of God is entrusted by God to the church.What is the relationship of the word which God speaks and to which the church bears witness on the one hand and what the contemporary world calls information on the other? There are important differences between the Word which is communicated in the gospel and information as it is understood in a digital world (1997:55).

Lochhead does not provide answers, but invites users to be aware of these issues as they use the net for ministry. He is quite clear that using the Internet will force the Church to rethink its traditional ways. Though information, as understood in information technology, might seem to be a poor vehicle for faith communication, yet information is permeating every sphere of life and our faith has to be expressed and communicated in ways familiar to present day culture and practice. In a culture of many voices, the Church will have to be one of the voices heard (1997).

Groothuis (1999), in *The Soul in Cyberspace*, questions whether the use of hypertext could lead users to becoming superficial rather than profound as they delve into the information offered. He wonders how people use games, email, chat-rooms and distance education as leisure time activities. He queries whether being online is preventing us from real, face to face, contact and making human beings more aggressive than they would be in real life. In the context of faith, he warns that machines shape us by equipping our imaginations and language with powerful new images, metaphors and assumptions. Groothuis evaluates the Internet's use for religious purposes by calling the Christian community to ask if the Internet is an appropriate medium for its sacred message. He argues that "all technologies, particularly information technologies extensively alter all forms of life –usually in invisible and subtle ways" and sees

cyberspace technology as affecting “our souls and our society.” He fears that “technology has taken the place of deity, and people serve it instead of God” (Groothuis 1999:15). Groothuis claims to be a wary observer of the Internet and cautions people about jumping on the Internet bandwagon without evaluating it.

Schultze (2002), in *Habits of the High-Tech Heart*, is similarly critical of the impact of the Internet on our lives and especially on moral values. Schultze’s line of argument contends that today’s society is governed by ‘informationism’, a quasi-religious faith in the power of information to change lives. He believes that an ‘informationist’ society values short-term goals over long-term humanistic ones, and equates information, speed and technology with morality and virtue. Schultz warns about the new tendencies promoted by the Internet: individualism over community, speed, efficiency and convenience over quality, morality and virtue. Rather than the present influencing the past values and traditions, Schultze advocates that we hold on to habits of the heart, which embody the virtues and morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

To regain a moral footing in contemporary life, we must dig deeper than information and knowledge, to the traditions that carry virtue from generation to generation. We will have to invest as much time and energy in the habits of our hearts as we do in our high-tech practices (Schultze, 2002:209).

While not against the Internet, Schultze believes that we have to move into it cautiously, keeping the Christian ideal and perspective in mind to avoid the perils of the Internet.

Houston (1998), in *Virtual Morality*, takes a critical approach focusing on ethical issues surrounding virtual reality. He argues that in an age where reality is broken down into

images, Christians who interact with virtual reality are caught in the tension between affirming the *imago Dei* or creating a new “sense of selfhood” (1998:185). Houston encourages Christians who use the new technologies to use discernment, so that they can inform technology rather than letting it influence their worldview. This would imply being at home and familiar with technology while at the same time being critical of the path down which it may lead. Though Beckerlegge (2001) acknowledges the many positive benefits of the Internet for religion enumerated earlier, she points out the disadvantages of using the Internet. She cautions that it would favour a privileged few rather than be available to the masses, and that the net could be used for homophobic purposes by religious fundamentalists.

William Cork (2002), reporting on the 3rd biennial Internet Conference of Howard University, contends that the Internet might not be suitable for religion because genuine human interaction, of which religious interaction may be the deepest, has to be embodied. Worship for example, is not just preaching a sermon to convey unchangeable propositions. Describing worship, Cork feels that

It is rather a medley of sight, sound, smell, and movement.... Technology will never replace the essential, simple bodily acts of Christian worship: washing with water, anointing with oil, and baking bread (<http://www.wquercus.com/articles/is2k.htm>).

According to Cork, while the Internet can be used for some religious purposes it can never replace religion. He supports his argument quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church which says:

Science and technology ...must be at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, of his true and integrated good, in conformity with the plan and the will of God [2294] (Chapman, 1994:493).

Evaluating the Internet, Cork hopefully states

We have reason to be optimistic. Not because threats are slight or because technology is powerful, but because we are in the hands of a God who is more powerful than our abilities to destroy ourselves. To him we turn our eyes, looking beyond our fears and beyond the fascination and threat of the world ([http://www.wquercus.com/articles/is 2k.htm](http://www.wquercus.com/articles/is%20.htm)).

2.2.4 Ethnographic studies of Church's use of the Internet

In the 1990s, studies hinged on observing the culture that the Internet has created and are grounded in communication practices used by net users. Though some research has taken this approach in studying online religious practice and groups, not many examples are currently available. Schroeder, Heather and Lee have written a paper, 'The Sacred and the Virtual: Religion in a Multi-User Reality', (1998) which explored the social interaction among participants in an online virtual prayer group, examining the main features of such meetings in a virtual environment. The paper also compared exchanges between online participants in the virtual prayer group with the contents at a conventional prayer service, drawing out implications for the virtual and real world (<http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue2/schroeder.html>).

Heidi Campbell (2001) has carried out a study on 'An investigation of the nature of the Church Through an Analysis of Selected Email-Based Christian Online Communities', through which she explores online community relationships which challenge what traditionally constitutes community. In her essay in *Mediating Religion* Campbell states:

This thesis investigated Christian online communities, with special emphasis on studying the nature of community and cyberspace. The purpose was to identify the

characteristics of community which individuals are seeking to cultivate in the online setting, showing possible implications for individuals in the 'real world' church and offline communities (Mitchell and Marriage, 2003:221).

Miller and Slater (2000), in *'The Internet'*, used an ethnographic approach to research a regional study of the social uses of the Internet in Trinidad. As part of their exploration, they attempt to understand not just the experience of being online, but the social and cultural contexts in which online religious usage occurs. They found that various religious communities are using the Internet to resolve problems of space and location, both in the dispersed Trinidadian church and in local parish churches. They also found that the net technologies seems to have advantages over traditional spiritual dialogue and that the Internet may be foreshadowing a new model of church for the future. (<http://ethnonet.gold.ac.uk/summary.html>)

The Barna Research (2001)

The Barna Research Group did an ethnographic study based on three national surveys executed during the latter half of 2000. The Barna Study found that people are in the early stages of warming to the idea of cyber faith. When asked about their likely use of the Internet to search for and become involved in specific types of religious experiences, more than two thirds indicated that they were likely to engage in such pursuits on a regular basis as time goes on. (Barna:2001).

In fact, if the research projections hold true, even the least appealing of the 11 Net-based faith alternatives tested (online worship) would likely attract some 30 to 35 million adults. The most attractive option (listening to religious teaching online) would likely draw more than 100 million adults

George Barna, who directed the study for the Barna Institute, felt that numerous changes would emerge in people's faith experiences in the years ahead. He also noted that there will be numerous challenges to churches and faith communities because of the developments in technology. Christian Internet users already spend more time surfing the Net than they do communicating with God by prayer (Barna Research 2001).

Pew Internet & American Life Project (2003)

'The Pew Internet & American Life' survey claims to be the first extensive quantitative effort to discover how churches and synagogues in America use the Internet. The ongoing Pew Project survey suggests that there is a healthy audience for spiritual material online. Larsen, reporting online on the survey 'Wired churches, wired temples' reveals that the Internet is being used by congregations to strengthen the faith and the spiritual growth of their members, to evangelize in their communities and around the world, and to perform a wide variety of pious and practical activities for their congregations. One interesting insight pertained to how they used the Internet for communication.

They are much more likely to use the web for one-way communication features such as posting sermons or basic information, than they are to have two-way communications features or interactive features such as spiritual discussions, prayer or fund raising (http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Religion_Report.pdf).

The survey also shows that about a fifth of US Internet users have gone online to get religious and spiritual information (Pew Report: 2003). This survey's conclusion however is not representative of all users of the Internet.

The Pew Internet and American Life Research is similar to the Barna Research in so far as it leans heavily on the findings of the quantitative survey and draws conclusions from the same. The Pew research differs from the former in so far as it claims to be the first extensive quantitative survey of how churches and synagogues in the United States use the Internet. It also differs in so far as it goes beyond Christianity to Judaism and non church congregations. It also does a comparative study of congregational websites and varied religious and quasi-religious usage of the Internet.

2.2.5 Issues of Religion/Church raised by studies and research

From the review undertaken, it is apparent that many of the studies focus on the existence of religious websites on the Internet and that these websites are representative of traditional, established as well as newer forms of religions. Some others question whether religion should be on the Internet, while others claim that, together with other human interests, religion has a rightful place on the Internet. The proposed study will examine whether Catholics are aware of the Internet's use for religious purposes and whether they believe that the net should and can be, used for religious purposes.

The studies explore the various religious uses for which the Internet can be used and some authors propose that the Internet is conducive to religion because it has a spirituality and sacredness inherent to it. This study will explore in what way the Catholics in Bombay are using the Internet, whether they feel that the use of the Internet is compatible with their traditional religious practices and spirituality.

Many of the studies and research projects concentrate on the possible effects of using the Internet for religious purposes and, while there are many who see its advantages for enhancing community life and faith practices and a more relevant spirituality, the critics warn of the harmful consequences for religious authorities, community, religious teaching and practices. Further, they question whether a pragmatic tool can be used for a sacred purpose, and believe that the two are incompatible. This research will explore whether the Catholics in Mumbai are aware of the positive or negative consequences of using the Internet for religion.

The studies reviewed have adopted a variety of approaches in examining the use of the Internet for religious purposes. Some have used an observational approach in studying the phenomenon of religion on the net, others have used a philosophical/theological approach in looking at the issues arising from net use for religion, while still others have used an ethnographic approach. In this last approach, some have observed online and virtual groups and how they have used the Internet and its effects on their religious practices. This particular study will also use the ethnographic approach to explore the perceptions of religious users of the Internet. The question that must be asked is whether this study differs from what has already been explored and what is its original contribution.

2.2.6 New Aspects covered by the proposed research

All the studies reviewed so far approach the Internet, religion and church from a Western, mainly North American point of view, the one exception being that in Trinidad. This study proposes to look at the church and the Internet from an Asian, and specifically Indian, perspective to see whether the findings of the West are corroborated or differ from the Asian/Indian view point. Secondly, most of the issues discussed by the authors reviewed are based on insights of a few representatives of religions and a few pioneers of Internet usage and information technology. This study is primarily based on the people's perception of their use or non-use of the Internet shared in focus groups and through survey questionnaires. Thirdly, it is evident from the review that not much research has been conducted by the Catholic Church as to whether its members are using the Internet for their religious needs. Whatever research has been done is mainly confined to the North American Christian experience. This research is focused predominantly on the usage of the Internet by Catholics, and their perception of its possible use.

Fourthly, some of the studies suggest that the Internet needs to be used because it has a spirituality or a soul of its own. This study does not support that view. The perceptions of the users of the Catholic Church do not suggest that they see the Internet as replacing the role of religion. They perceive the Internet merely as a tool to be used for religion. Fifthly, keeping in mind the Church's teaching and policy about using the Internet for various religious purposes, the study will seek to find out how far the policy is being implemented and, if it is not, what might be done to implement the policy in practice.

2.3. Statistics on Religion/Christianity/Catholics websites

Religion on the Internet

Before moving to a discussion of the relationship of the Catholic Church and the media, it might be useful to glance at the actual presence of religion and Christianity on the Internet in terms of websites. As the number of websites increase on the net, one can observe a corresponding increase in the number of websites connected or related to religion. Health and sports websites were also accessed to compare and contrast them with religion. Search engines were accessed to discover if there were any trends emerging with regard to religion on the Internet. While a large majority of users would appear to be interested in sports websites, health and religion almost seem to have equal numbers of users. However, it has to be pointed out that the website count merely indicated sites that dealt with, or were connected with, the topic, without analysing their actual content.

Table 1 Religion, Health, and Sport sites accessed on 30th March 2004

Search Engine:	Religion	Health	Sports
Yahoo	55,600,600	65,800,000	213,000,000
Google	30,500,000	11,500,000	133,000,000
Lycos	29,727,396	22,324,100	83,315,618
AskJeeves	24,580,000	24,990,000	77,710,000
MSN Search	12,075,339	14,101,413	40,211,989
Altavista	10,541,801	7,151,858	25,629,633

Select Indian Search Engines

As effort was also made to access websites through Indian search engines in order to find out if religious websites figure on these search engines. Though not as popular in their presence as on Westerns search engines, religion did feature prominently on the following search engines.

Khoj (Search): a popular Indian search engine that has 115 links to religion. Religion is also featured under 'Culture', one of the fourteen main categories of the site. 'Religion and Spirituality' lists seven religions namely, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Islam. Christianity has nine links to Christian organizations, festivals, traditions, texts, newspapers, sects, personalities and religious places. Each of these links are further subdivided and sub-linked to other related topics (http://www.khoj.com/Society_and_Culture/Religion_and_Spirituality/)

123 India: another Indian search engine has six categories of religions with 43 main links to religious categories. Buddhism has 16 websites, Christianity has 56, Hinduism has 130, Islam has 22, Jainism has 15, Sikhism has 4, while faith and practices has 32 websites. Practically all refer only to websites hosted from India and do not include the internationally hosted ones (http://dir.123india.com/society_and_culture/religions/).

Samachar:(News) One of the major Indian online websites, features religion, among the ten major topics of the site, advertising it as the virtual path to divinity. This Religious site has 265 links to sites connected with various religions, of which Hinduism has 96

links, Christianity has 48, Buddhism has 32, Jainism has 21, Sikhism and Islam, 18 each and other religions have 19 site links. The religious categories of each site generally provide further links to religious information, scriptures, temples, pilgrimage centres and the philosophies of each religion. (<http://sify.com/samacharreligion/>)

Christianity on the Net

There have been a number of attempts to compile an exhaustive list of Christian websites. Baker (1997); Fox (1997); Raymond (1997) and Blackmore (2000) provide a compendium of Christian online resources. No doubt Christianity has a growing presence and its websites have increased over the years.

If cyberspace is a digital ocean, then Christianity online is its tidal wave. As of early 1997, Christian websites made up more than 80 percent of the web sites of the world's five major (i.e. most influential) religions.... Of the nearly 2 billion Christians in the world, about 55 percent are Roman Catholic. Yet Roman Catholic sites make up less than 25 percent of the sites indexed by Yahoo in December 1996 under the category of "Christianity: Denominations and Sects." (Zaleski, 1997: 100)

Christopher Helland, in his article 'Popular Religion and the World Wide Web' in *Online Religion* points out the growth of Christianity on the net.

By 1999, of the 11,000 websites focussing upon Christian beliefs and practices in Yahoo's Religion and Spirituality subsection, 7,000 (or 64 percent) represented "official" denominations (Keene 1999). As of August 2002, the categories of Web sites representing Christian beliefs and practices had increased by over 300 percent and showed no signs of abating. (Dawson & Cowan, 2004: 26)

Search engines were accessed twice within a five month period to find out if there were any trends emerging with regard to Christianity and the Catholic Church on the Internet.

The data in Table 2 appears to indicate that side by side with other religions, Christianity and Catholicism in particular, are growing on the net.

Table 2

Search Eng.	Religion		Christian		Catholic	
	Mar-04	July-04	Mar-04	July-04	Mar-04	July-04
Yahoo	55,600,600	58,400,000	8,590,000	9,960,300	4,200,000	18,100,000
Google	30,500,000	31,000,000	5,870,000	5,930,000	3,140,000	14,400,000
Lycos	29,727,396	12,410,000	6,856,868	1,919,965	3,426,116	3,741,977
AskJeeves	24,580,000	34,610,000	4,198,000	11,910,000	1,647,000	8,743,000
MSN	12,075,339	12,210,746	1,883,243	1,891,718	919,340	3,702,106
Altavista	10,541,801	21,736,076	1,494,609	4,251,237	760,526	8,267,747

The Search engines above were accessed on 30-3-04 and on 1-7-04

Table 3 **Catholicism on the Internet - What's on the Internet for Catholics**

It is not an easy task to compile the number of Catholic websites available on the Internet, because new sites are added daily. However, attempts have been made notably by Brother John Raymond (1997), to publish compiled directories of Catholic sites. He locates sites under categories as Christian resources, home pages, and directories. In his Top 20 Catholic Homepages and Internet directories, he lists 20,000 websites.

From this brief analysis of statistical data we can conclude that the number of religious websites, and catholic websites in particular, appear to be increasing on the web. However, most of the Catholic studies undertaken so far have been compilations of directories of Catholic net resources, which do not explore websites or how they are being used, but merely indicate their presence on the Internet.

Part II

The Church's relationship with the media

Introduction

Part II examines the relationship of the church to the media. Firstly, we seek to define to which church we are referring in our study of 'church and the media'. To understand how believers perceive the media today, it is necessary to look at the church's past attitude towards the media, and its response to the challenges of the evolving media. The church's attitude will be spelt out in its official policy towards the media as promulgated in its teachings, contained in the documents on Church communication. Furthermore, the attitude is reflected in the implementation of church policy through the communication structures and organizations it has created to support its communication efforts. This brief overview of the Church's attitude towards the media is necessary as it will help to understand the people's perception of the Internet and their use or lack of it, and consequently why the Internet is being used or not being used today. Part III will examine the church's attitude and policy towards the Internet itself and how its implementation is being carried out by the church by hosting religious websites.

2.4 Which Church?

The English word 'church' derives from the Greek adjective 'kyriakos', meaning 'belonging to the Lord.' It could have been a short form for 'kyriakos domos', meaning the 'Lord's house'. Its first reference is likely to be for the building in which the Christians met for worship – and this is usually the first meaning when the word is used in English. But the word 'church' was used in the scriptures to translate another Greek

word 'ekklesia', which referred not to the building but to an official assembly of people, which is the secondary and main meaning of what we imply by church today. Its closest equivalent in English would be 'convocation' – 'a calling out together'. A leading theologian of the Catholic Church, Avery Dulles, states that the:

Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Church made ample use of the models of Body of Christ and the Sacrament, but its dominant model was rather that of the People of God. This paradigm focused attention on the Church as a network of interpersonal relationships, on the Church as community" (1987:30).

The primary meaning of 'ekklesia' in the New Testament is of an assembly meeting for worship. From this use, it is then extended to the community of the faithful in any given place. One could thus define a church as a community of Christians established in a particular locality, accustomed to meeting regularly for worship. When we refer to 'the church' today, it is assumed that we are referring to the universal church, but the New Testament writers always referred to the local church (Komonchak, Collins and Lane, 1987:185-187).

In current Christian usage, the word 'church' designates the liturgical assembly, the local community as well as the universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. Vatican II says "the universal Church is seen to be a people of God brought together into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." The same Vatican II document on the church refers to the church as the 'People of God' (Flannery, 1975:359). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the church as follows: " 'The Church' is the people of God that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic

assembly”[752] (Chapman,1994:173). However, the church, especially since the middle ages, was also seen as a hierarchical institution, with a visible structure and with powers vested in its office holders. Because of the schisms and divisions among Christians, the word Church is now used frequently with a denominational descriptor, as in ‘the Methodist Church’, ‘the Anglican Church’ and ‘the Roman Catholic Church.’ In this study, I will mainly deal with the Roman Catholic Church, or Catholic Church, and will refer to it simply as church.

2.5 Church’s response to media: Attitudes, policy/ implementation

In examining the way the Church has reacted and responded to the changing media scene one can observe that it has faced the challenges and opportunities that the media have posed. Over a period of time the attitude and the position of the church has undergone a change from hostility and confrontation to collaboration, from condemnation to acceptance, from avoidance and distancing itself to becoming involved and being present in the media. At each stage, we shall examine the stance of the Church and its evolving vision as contained in the documents and the structures set up by the Church to cope with this challenge.

Traditionally, the Church has handed down the message of faith through oral tradition which is direct and face to face. It also believes in building a rapport between those who proclaim the faith and those who are recipients of the message. With direct communication, the message can be tailored to the audience. There are less chances of

being misunderstood as there are possibilities for instant feedback and clarification of errors and misunderstandings. Traditionally, therefore face to face preaching and teaching are the favoured mode of communication of the Church.

2.5.1 Church confronted by media

The development of the print media has challenged the Catholic Church since the invention of moveable type in the 1450s. The Church saw this new media as a threat to its control over peoples lives. The monopoly of the hierarchy was being questioned as people began to read the Bible and interpret it as they understood it. Elizabeth Eisenstein, in her book on the role of the printing press, claims that the Protestant clergy

viewed printing as a providential device which ended forever a priestly monopoly of learning, overcame ignorance and superstition, pushed back the evil forces commanded by the Italian popes, and, in general, brought Western Europe out of the dark ages (1979:305).

Whilst in oral cultures people gathered together to hear the preacher and were bound by his authority, in the emerging written culture, the congregation gathered around the written word, which could be read and understood by any one in any place. William Fore holds that

printing gave a mighty push to the concept that meanings are in people, that ideas get their authority from widespread acceptance, and that individuals should make their own decisions rather than accept those handed down from a higher authority (1990:33).

Church's attitude: Anti-media stance

To combat the influence of the print media the first reaction of the Catholic Church was to restrict the use of books. This was institutionalized in the *Index Librorum*

Prohibitorum (Index of Prohibited Books) in 1559 by the Inquisition of the Roman Catholic Church, and only ended in 1966 under Pope Paul VI. One of the repercussions of the debate was the conflict between popular culture and elite culture. Popular tastes were considered low and to be meant for the uneducated. To be cultured was to acquire the sophisticated tastes of the elite. The church feared that popular tastes pandered to human weaknesses and were possibly occasions of sin.

Church's Policy

'Christiana Reipublicae', the earliest document on communication, is an encyclical letter of Pope Clement XIII written in 1766 on the dangers of antichristian writings. "The Pope there talks about the contents of bad books, presumptuous theologians and the duty of bishops towards the evil of bad books and immoral literature" (Eilers, 1997: 10). As can be noticed from the subject matter of this letter, the Church saw itself as the guardian of the faith and the morals of its followers, and it also saw the danger to people's faith and life of the possibilities of being polluted by the evil influence of the bad world. It would seem that this earliest letter of the Church appears to have had a negative view of the media and therefore exhorted its followers to be cautious while reading books.

Church on guard against media

Though the media evolved into newer and newer forms and though the church also changed its attitude towards the media, it must be said that the church's magisterium has always seen itself as the custodian of the faith and the morals of society. It has never

ceased to warn its members of the possible dangers to the faith that could stem from the excessive use of existing media. Just as it has warned its members of bad books and a yellow press, it continued to warn its members of the dangers of indiscriminate watching of films when these began exercising an enormous influence on society. The Legion of Decency was formed by some priests and lay people in the United States in 1934 to combat immoral movies. People took a pledge, in church, against bad movies, an effective campaign that discouraged Hollywood. This movement became an influential force, respected by film makers, producers and distributors in the United States. The American bishops informed the Pope of their initiative. He, in turn, wanted to promote the goals of the Legion of decency throughout the world. Towards the end of the 1950s, the emphasis changed from condemnation to recommendation. A deliberate effort was made to make The Legion of Decency more 'positive'. Whether it was the radio, cinema or television, the initial reaction of the Church was to keep off these popular media as they were seen largely incompatible with the practice of Christian faith.

Church's Policy

Vigilanti Cura, on motion pictures, the first pontifical instructional letter (encyclical) on the mass media, was issued by Pope Pius XI on 29th June 1936. The document encouraged the film classification system by national film boards.

Therefore, it will be necessary that in each country the Bishops set up a permanent national viewing office in order to promote good motion pictures, classify the others and bring this judgement to the knowledge of priests and faithful [§ 48] (Quoted in Eilers, 1997:21).

It supported the initiative for church-owned parish cinemas to promote good films through their own movie houses and distribution networks.

The next encyclical, *Miranda Prorsus* on motion pictures, radio and television, by Pope Pius XII, promulgated 8th September 1957, can be considered as an extension of the previous document. It is characterised by openness and by the personal interest of the pope in the new mass media. While continuing to warn of the possible dangers of film and television, the pope acknowledged the positive potential of the electronic media.

Motion pictures, which came into existence some 60 years ago, must today be numbered among the most important means by which ideas and discoveries of our times can be made known [§ 74] (Quoted in Eilers:1997:39).

As a result of this instructional letter, the Catholic hierarchy turned its attention to the power of films and set about implementing guidelines and a classification list for watching only good and safe films. A by-product of this move was the setting up of national film reviewing offices, church-owned parish cinemas to promote good films, cine-fora for the appreciation of good films and film distribution by Catholic publications and organizations. (Eilers:1997: 40-44)

Conclusion

Looking at the relationship between the media and the Church it has been seen that initially the attitude of the church towards the media was negative, critical and suspicious. The media were seen as a threat to the power, position and monopoly of the Church, and were perceived as challenging the Church's teaching role while questioning and undermining the faith and morals of its followers. Consequently, the church first

tried to ignore the media and keep its distance from it. As the media continued to grow and to exercise considerable influence on believers, the church tried to control the media by banning and censoring their use and cautioning against harmful effects. This attitude was also influenced by the perception that religion, and religious practices, were looked upon as sacred, while the rest of life, with its many preoccupations, was considered mundane and secular. Traces of such an attitude still colour peoples perceptions today, as we will see when we explore how believers perceive the Internet.

2.5.2 Church and media use

It has already been pointed out that the church started interacting with the media in its efforts to control and neutralize its influence on believers. At the same time, the church became aware of the power and potential of the media for both good and evil in society. Gradually, it looked on the media as possible tools of evangelization. Because of the potential for good, the church endorsed the use and the ownership of the new means of mass communication. However, there was still a lingering fear that the media might have a negative influence on believers, so the Church decided to use the media in moderation. It also tried to have its own media, so that it could curb possible negative influences. It encouraged Church-owned, parallel media productions, and organizations. From the fact that it proposed only limited use of media and that of its own, rather than secular media, it can be seen that the Church, while using the media, was not ready to fully endorse or be involved with them. At the same time, it was acknowledging their

positive role and possibilities for church use. The idea of using the media as a tool for communication has been affirmed by Popes through the centuries.

Church's Policy

The document *Inter Mirifica* (1963) claimed that the church had the right to use and own the mass media, and that the purposes for which the media were used would ultimately define whether the media were good or bad. Just as the Catholic church feels obliged to preach the gospel, it believes that its task of preaching the “good news” involves employing the means of social communication to announce the good of salvation, and to teach men how to use it properly.

It is the Church's birthright to use any of these media which are necessary and useful for the formation of Christians and for pastoral activity. Pastors of souls have the task of instructing and directing the faithful how to use these media in a way that will ensure their own salvation and perfection and that of all mankind.[§3] (Quoted in Eilers, 1997: 60).

The decree, while spelling out the need to use means of communication, also cautioned about the responsibilities of users and producers to use them solely for the good of mankind. This decree confirmed communications as an important and integral part of church policy and practice, and institutionalized the church's efforts by establishing a secretariat to promote social communications and in 1967 initiated the World Communication Day to be held in the whole Church. The next document *Communio et Progressio*, promulgated May 23, 1971, is considered the *Magna Carta* of Catholic communication and contains a theology of communications which goes beyond the instrumentality of the media.

The Church sees these media as gifts of God, which, in accordance with his providential design, unite men in brotherhood and so help them to cooperate with his plan for their salvation. [§ 2] The channels of social communication, are indispensable to the smooth functioning of modern society, with its complex and ever changing needs...In the Christian faith the unity and brotherhood of mankind are the chief aims of all communication and these find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live a single divine life [§ 6] (Quoted in Eilers,1997: 74-75).

While former documents tended to give orders and to refer to the rights and obligations of the Church, this document builds more on personal responsibility. It stresses the need for training and formation in using the media to obtain maximum benefits. *Communio et Progressio* is one of the most positive church documents on social communications. It highlights the contributions the communications media have made to human progress.

The means of communication provide some of the most effective means to build new relationships and fashion a new language which allows people to know themselves better and understand one another more easily [§ 12] (Quoted in Eilers, 1997:76).

2.5.2.1 Church's own media

While the Church endorsed the use of the media and proposed that they could be profitably used for the development and for the progress of mankind, at the same time it would seem that the church was still a little wary of media users being unduly influenced by the secular media, and so it encouraged its believers to use the church's media and media structures. Besides catering to its own internal clientele, it also desired to make its Catholic presence and view point known among the secular media.

Catholic Press

The Church's attitude towards the printed word can be illustrated by the uses missionaries made of books and periodicals. Religious orders, which were entrusted with missionary work, established printing presses for their own publications in local languages, and, significantly, of Catholic newspapers and magazines. A South Asian News Bureau chief, Jose Kavi, points out that

In India at present the Catholic Church manages 307 Church publications from dailies to quarterlies in various languages. For a community that forms 2.18 percent of the country's 1.02 billion people (2001 census), this is quite significant and inspiring (D'Souza, 2002: 23).

Catholic Press Organization

With a view to organizing and coordinating the press apostolate, the church founded the International Bureau of Catholic Journalists in 1927. It was transformed in 1935 into the International Union of the Catholic Press (UCIP), to attract Catholic journalists as members. Its council meets yearly to review and guide the policy of the Catholic Press. In Asia, the South Asia Catholic Press Association (SACPA) is composed of representatives of South Asian countries to assist the Catholic press and its journalists in matters of coordination and orientation. Its Indian counterpart, the Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA), was founded by a group of editors in 1964, and its membership includes most of the Catholic periodicals of India, Indian Catholic publishers and journalists. On the Asian level, the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) was started in 1979 to report news about, and of interest to, the Church in Asia. It is the largest Asian Church News service and offers products and services such as the UCAN daily

news service, in English, and UCAN reports in Cebuano, Chinese, Bahasa Indonesia, Korean, Tamil and Vietnamese, UCAN Photo Service and Asia Focus, an Asian Church weekly newsletter. (<http://www.ucanews.com/html/ucan/index.html>)

Catholic Radio -Radio Vatican/ Radio Veritas Asia

Rome took the lead in establishing Vatican Radio in 1931 when Marconi, the inventor of the radio, and Pope Pius XI inaugurated its initial broadcast. Vatican Radio now broadcasts programmes in 40 languages, on short wave, medium wave, FM, and satellite, with more than 22.000 hours of simultaneous broadcasting including news, live reports, religious celebrations, in-depth programmes and music. The Jesuit Order has been charged with the management of Vatican Radio since its inception in 1931 (<http://www.vaticanradio.org/inglese/enindex.html>)

The Latin American Church began to broadcast over its own station, TIRCC, 6550 kHz shortwave, in Costa Rica in 1936 and it is believed to be the oldest Catholic radio station in Latin America. In North America, the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) has been broadcasting Catholic radio programmes to believers in America, Europe and other parts of the world (<http://www.ewtn.com/>). In Asia, the first continent-wide Catholic radio station was Radio Veritas, inaugurated in Manila, Philippines in 1969. Radio Veritas broadcasts in 25 languages throughout Asia. Radio Veritas has regional production centers in the main language areas. Beside Radio Vatican, it is the only continent-wide short wave radio station of the Church broadcasting in 25 languages spoken in 21 countries (<http://www.rveritas-asia.org/>).

Catholic Television

As with other forms of electronic communication, the Church gradually realized the potential of television for evangelization. However, in contrast to the press it has used the existing state or commercial television stations and networks for its religious programming. The Vatican started its own regular telecast of the Papal events, which have grown in a spectacular way with the world-wide travels of the present Pope, John Paul II. The Vatican Television Center (CTV) created in 1983, offers live broadcasts, special productions, archiving, and daily assistance to broadcasters around the world. (http://www.vatican.va/news_services/television/multimedia/live_en.html). The Catholic Radio and Television Network (CRTN) (<http://www.crtv.org/home.php3>) in Germany and Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) in North America make Catholic radio and television programmes available to countries in Europe, North America and other parts of the world. In Asia, while a few countries like Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines have their own Church Television broadcasts, other countries utilize mainstream Television to telecast Church programmes when time slots are available.

2.5.2.2 Catholic media structures

O.C.I.C. -International Catholic Association for Cinema and Audiovisuals

In 1928 the Church approved of the founding of the International Catholic Film Organisation (OCIC) at the Hague by a group of lay professionals for the promotion and

distribution of good cinema, for the training of professionals, the education of the public in the exercise of their critical faculties and the development of cinema in the Church. OCIC has given awards to films at the most important film festivals, using its own juries. Of the three official media organizations, OCIC was the oldest.

Unda - International Catholic Radio/Television Broadcasting Association

In 1928, *Unda* – Latin word for the ‘Wave’, was established by the Church as the International Catholic Association for radio, and television. It was meant to coordinate the growing worldwide network of Catholic associations and individuals engaged in radio and, later, television broadcasting, and provides them with a forum for professional collaboration. Unda represented almost 140 national and 26 international Catholic Associations in a worldwide network. Together with Unda, OCIC was amalgamated and restructured into the new media organization, *SIGNIS*, in Rome in 2001.

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications

In 1948, Pope Pius XII, first established the Pontifical Commission for the Study and Ecclesiastical Evaluation of Films on Religious or Moral Subjects. After several changes over the years, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications evolved and was set up at the end of the Vatican Council in 1989. Since its inception it has been responsible for the preparation and promulgation of the Church’s documents on social communications. The Council has encouraged the systematic study of media, and has issued directives on the media formation and training of church personnel. (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/).

Catholic Church Communications Focus- World Communication Day

To retain the vision of the Church with regard to the communications, and to mobilise its members in this endeavour, the Church established the celebration of World Communication Day by a Decree of the Vatican Council *Inter Mirifica*, [§18]. The first World Communication Day was celebrated on 6th May, 1967. The pope publishes a message, which treats the communication theme of the year, related to current issues of church and society. Franz Josef Eilers feels that “seen together, these messages over more than 25 years give quite a good insight into the communication approaches. They can be considered a basis for a deeper analysis of the church’s contribution to human society as well as to the communication of the church herself.”(1997: 212).

Conclusion

One can observe the change in the attitude of the church towards the media. From a confrontational and defensive initial stance, the Church adopted a positive attitude. This changeover was gradual and came about as the Church realized the possibilities for using the media for its own religious purposes. To bolster its use of the media, the church proposed a theology of communication. The Church has always been missionary and felt compelled to use every means available to evangelize people and spread the Catholic faith. Even as it used the media, the Church still had reservations about their secular outlook and hence tried to Christianize the media by having media of its own. Those who used the media were asked to use them with caution, guarding against their negative and secular influence. This initiative resulted in church media productions,

support structures and organizations, which duplicated and paralleled mainstream media and, in most cases, resulted in a ghetto mentality and an inward-looking closed-in church, rather than a church open and at the service of all. A further consequence of the church having its own media has been that the media are still often perceived as a specialized field for a few Catholics rather than as an environment in which all believers should exercise themselves.

2.5.3 Church in the mainstream media

The thinking that evolved after Vatican II has gradually tried to keep pace with the changing times. The Church has seen the need not only to use the media, but has also made some efforts to become involved in the media scene by immersing itself and making its presence felt in mainstream media. The Church no longer competes with the media for influence and power. However, it does view the media as a force to be guarded against. It also views the media as an environment of society that could only be influenced by the Church being part of it and being present in it. To this end, the Church admonishes its followers to study and understand the media, its language and its environment by interacting and engaging with them.

Church Policy

'Aetatis Novae' – The Dawn of a New Age, promulgated in 1992, affirms that the mass media by no means detract from the importance of alternative media, which are open to people's involvement and permit them to interact and even design the processes of communication.

Today's revolution in social communications involves a fundamental reshaping of the elements by which people comprehend the world about them, and verify and express what they comprehend. ...Reality for many is what the media recognize as real [§ 4](Quoted in Eilers,1997:123).

What is noteworthy about this document is that the Church has gradually moved from viewing the media as instruments to be used by the Church for evangelization, to seeing the need to be present in the media and in the culture they are creating.

It is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications... with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology [§11] (Quoted in Eilers,1997:127).

The document has an appendix, which many consider almost as important as the document itself. It proposes pastoral planning in the uses of the media.

We, therefore, strongly recommend that dioceses and Episcopal conferences or assemblies include a communication component in every pastoral plan. We further recommend that they develop specific pastoral plans for social communications itself or else review and update those plans [§ 21] (Quoted in Eilers, 1997:131).

A concrete step in the direction of being present in the media, world and interacting with it, has been the growing cooperation between the Church and other Christian Communication Centres, government agencies, NGO's and secular communication bodies working in the field of communication. For the maximum utilization of resources and for maintaining standards of production, networking with a wide range of bodies has become inevitable. In his World Communication Day Message 2000, 'Proclaiming Christ in the Media at the dawn of the new Millennium', the pope proposed that

Catholic communicators must be bold in developing new media and methods of proclamation. But as much as possible, the Church must use the opportunities that are to be found in the secular media. (Quoted in Eilers, 2002:80)

SIGNIS -International Catholic communication Association

The Catholic media organization SIGNIS (2001), incorporating the former Unda and OCIC, has taken new initiatives in networking in the media with other international organizations, like UNESCO, UNICEF and the Council of Europe. SIGNIS is also supporting global initiatives like 'Communication for Peace', providing support for joint initiatives on Media Education, Community Radio, the Young Film-Makers Association and Web-masters forums. It also promotes joint initiatives for co-production, marketing and a digital database for all types of audio-visual resource materials (<http://www.signis.org/>). However, it is still struggling to open its membership to a variety of people so that it truly becomes Catholic in its outlook.

Conclusion

The present day attitude of the church towards communication reflects a radical change in its perception of the media and in its relationship with them. Giving up its defensive and competitive stance, the church sees itself in partnership with the media and calls upon its followers to be involved and immersed in them in order that the entire media sphere may be influenced by Christian values. Rather than seeing the media as an instrument to be used for a particular Christian goal, the media are seen as the environment in which we live. Living the faith is no longer seen as something apart from one's regular life, but something related and incarnated in daily living. This new attitude towards the media has still to take root and to influence the practical choices of believers in living out their faith commitment, especially in their relationships with the media.

Part III

2.6. Church in relationship to the Internet

2.6.1 Church's attitude towards New Media

The first lengthy reference to the computer age is mentioned in John Paul II's 24th World Communication Day message for the Year 1990. In it, the Pope mentioned that, far from standing aloof from the developments in the world of science and technology, the Church sees itself in the very midst of human progress, sharing in the experiences of the rest of humanity. He calls on Catholics to make creative use of the new discoveries and technologies for the benefit of humanity. Further, the Pope stresses:

It is clear that the Church must avail herself of the new resources provided by human exploration in computer and satellite technology for the ever pressing task of evangelization" (Quoted in Eilers 1997: 292).

He singles out the following uses: Data banks on religious information, instant access to Scripture sources, teachings, the history and traditions of the Church, and innovative presentations of the faith. Aware of young people's easy adaptation to and facility with computer culture, the pope calls on the Church to entrust to young people the duty to use these means for dialogue with the world. He concludes his message by challenging people, young or old, to respond to the new technologies by bringing to them a faith vision and "using the potential of the 'computer age' to serve man's human and transcendent calling" (Quoted in Eilers, 1997: 293).

Again, in the World Communication Day message of 2001, 'Preach from the housetops: The Gospel in the Age of Global Communications,' the pope refers to

the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teachings beyond all barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would be beyond the wildest imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us. What is therefore needed is an active and imaginative engagement of the media by the Church. Christians cannot possibly ignore the world of social communications (Quoted in Eilers 2002, 83).

The Church's presence in the media is in fact an important aspect of inculturation of the Gospel demanded by new evangelization

The pope, speaking of the Internet directly in the World Communication Day message of 2002, 'Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel', calls the new world of cyberspace a summons to the great adventure of using its potential for proclamation. The Pope highlights the countless resources of religious information, while at the same time alluding to the potential dangers the net can pose.

While the Internet can never replace that profound experience of God which only the living, sacramental life of the church can offer, it can provide a unique supplement and support... sustaining the new believer in the journey of faith (Quoted in Eilers 2002:85).

The pope desires that the Internet serve the cause of peace and concludes that the Internet will become a genuinely human space, "only when Christ's face is seen and his voice proclaimed" though the Internet (Quoted in Eilers 2002:86).

2.6.2. Ethics and the Internet

The two most recent documents on the Internet, promulgated in February 2002, by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications are ‘Ethics and the Internet’ and ‘The Church and the Internet’. The first document, asks the ethical question: are present day communications contributing to authentic human development and helping individuals to be true to their transcendent destiny. The document calls the Internet a marvellous technological instrument with many good uses but with potential to harm a person, depending on the purpose of its use, whether they are for the good of individuals and for their common good. In his introduction of the document Franz Josef Eilers states that “for the good of the Church but also for all others participating in such a world, basic principles for ethical evaluation are set out, based on the dignity of the human person and the communities of persons.”(2002:46). ‘Ethics in Internet’ maintains an overall positive perspective.

Fundamentally, though, we do not view the Internet only as a source of problems; we see it as a source of benefits to the human race. But the benefits can only be fully realized if the problems are solved [§ 6] (Eilers, 2002:50).

The document points out that the new technology drives and supports globalization, which is impacting on individuals and nations. The use of the Internet should be guided by a commitment to be at the service of the common good, within and among nations.

After enumerating its striking features, the document points out the net’s dangers. “It lends itself equally well to active participation and to passive absorption into a narcissistic self referential world of stimuli with near narcotic effects” [§ 7]. Because of

the free flow of ideas on the net, “there is an exaggerated individualism regarding the Internet that is emerging”, [8] and an accompanying belief that every sort of expression is allowed and one has the total liberty to do as one pleases.

The Internet can serve people in their responsible use of freedom and democracy,... It opens up a range of hitherto unthinkable possibilities. Already it has been used in aggressive ways, almost as a weapon of war, and people speak of cyber-terrorism [§ 9] (Quoted in Eilers, 2002: 52).

After stating the underlying principle of ethics, namely the individual and the common good, ‘Ethics in Internet’ takes up special areas of concern: the digital divide between those who have and have not; the possible threat to traditional values in the context of the dialogue of cultures; freedom of expression as a fundamental right; the right to information and the responsibility of the journalists to provide genuine information; and the dangers of mistaking virtual reality for real life and freedom of expression for unbounded freedom. The document alludes to

ethical question raised by the Internet about matters like privacy, the security and confidentiality of data, copyright and intellectual property law, pornography, hate sites, dissemination of rumours and character assassination under the guise of news, and much else”[§ 6].

The issue of pornography is not treated in depth in this document as it was already discussed in the documents ‘Pornography and Violence in the Media: A Pastoral Response’ (1989), ‘Ethics in Advertising’ (1997) and ‘Ethics in Communication’ (2000). The ‘digital divide’ caused by the Internet is of special concern for the Church. It believes

- the causes and the consequences of the divide are not only economic but also technical, social and cultural. Ways need to be found to make the Internet accessible to less advantaged groups...cyberspace ought to be a resource of comprehensive information and services available without charge to all, and in a wide range of

languages..... The Church is concerned that the winner in this process will be humanity as a whole and not just a wealthy elite that controls science, technology and the planet's resources (Quoted in Eilers, 2002:52-53).

The Church boldly defends freedom on the Internet. "Freedom to seek and know the truth is a fundamental right and freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy." (Eilers, 2002:53). The church also deplores attempts by public authorities to block access to information on the Internet, but alongside these issues the church is equally concerned with integrity and accuracy of information and the exalting of freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute in itself. It recommends regulating the Internet as desirable and suggests that in principle, industry self-regulation is best.

Archbishop John P. Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in his address at the UN on 'Information Technology for Development' highlighted the ethical basis for the Church's vision of communications.

I would hope that we remember three basic moral foundations of communication: the overriding importance of truth, the dignity of the human person and the promotion of the common good. These principles formed the basis of studies on ethics in advertising, in communications and the Internet published over the past five years by the Pontifical Council on Social Communications (20-June 2002). (<http://mirifica.net/wmprint.php?ArtID=160>)

Farhad Manjoo, commenting on the Church's document on the Internet in an online article 'What, Would Jesus Surf?' in *Wired News*, (1-3-2002) highlighted two issues.

Demonstrating its understanding of communications in the new millennium, the Vatican set out its 'Catholic view of the Internet' in an effort to bring moral wisdom to what it considered a 'marvellous technological instrument.'... The main area of concern, the Vatican said is the 'digital divide' which the church calls a 'form of discrimination.'... The church is also worried that the Internet, along with the rest of Western media, is drowning the globe in messages of 'Western secular culture.' (http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,50757,00.html?tw=wn_story_page_pre_v2)

2.7. The Church and the Internet

The document “The Church and the Internet” begins by restating the Church’s viewpoint that it sees the marvellous technical inventions, like the Internet, as gifts of God, doing much to meet human needs, and working for the unity and progress of humankind.

Thus the Church has taken a fundamental positive approach to the media. Even when condemning serious abuses, documents of this Pontifical Council for Social Communications have been at pains to make clear that a merely censorious attitude on the part of the church ... is neither sufficient nor appropriate [§1] (Quoted in Eilers 2002: 62).

2.7.1. The influence of the Internet

The document points out that the Internet is changing relationships of people, cultures and nations; changing not only how they communicate, but also how they understand their lives. It spells out the two-fold aim of the Church with regard to the media: to encourage their correct evolution for the sake of human development and progress and to support those involved in media work. The Church is also interested in looking at communication as it is used in and by the church. It sees Church communication not only as a medium or technique but as an expression of the divine communication of God given through His son Jesus Christ. Consequently, the Church believes that it is not enough to merely use the Internet and other modern means of communication as tools to spread the Christian message, but it must integrate that message into the new media culture created by modern communications. All this applies to the Internet, which the church believes offers unique opportunities for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole human family. Since it spans the whole world, Catholics are advised to enter

into this new missionary field that the Gospel of Jesus Christ might be proclaimed from the housetops. [§ 4] (Eilers,2002:62-71).

Uses of the Internet

Examining the opportunities and challenges posed by the Internet, the document suggests that the church needs to understand the Internet, especially to communicate with young people who are at home in this new technology. Enumerating the benefits of the Internet from a religious perspective, the document says:

this new media can carry news and information about religious events, ideas and personalities; they serve as a vehicle for evangelization and catechesis. Day in and day out they provide inspiration, encouragement and opportunities for worship to persons confined to their homes or to institutions.....It offers people direct and immediate access to important religious and spiritual resources..... It has a remarkable capacity to overcome distance and isolation, bringing people into contact with like-minded people of goodwill who join in virtual communities of faith to encourage and support one another [§5] (Quoted in Eilers,2002:64)

The document also encourages Church bodies to develop an Internet presence and to enter into cyberspace at the global, national, and local level. The document also points out the relevance to many activities and programmes of the Church:

- evangelization, including both re-evangelization and new evangelization and the traditional missionary work *ad gentes*, catechesis and other kinds of education, news and information, apologetics, governance and administration, and some forms of pastoral counselling and spiritual direction [§5] (Quoted in Eilers 2002:65).

Internet's relevance for church's communication needs

The document points out the added benefit of the Internet for reaching out to special groups.

“It provides the Church with a means of communicating with particular groups- young people and young adults, the elderly and the home-bound, persons living in remote areas, the members of other religious bodies –who otherwise may be difficult to reach” [§5]. (Quoted in Eilers, 2002: 65)

The document also says the Internet should be used for internal communications, as it is direct, immediate, interactive and participatory. In line with the teaching of the church, this medium could benefit all members of the Church, especially the laity, to participate and give voice to their feelings, ideas and opinions on Church-related matters. It could help in creating public opinion and foster discussion and a better understanding of faith matters. As an interactive medium, the Internet could become an excellent means to achieve the vision and mission of the church with regard to its internal communication. Another field that the Internet opens up, is the area of education and training. Media education, which the church has pioneered in several countries, should now include training in the Internet. But teaching about the Internet should involve much more than techniques; young people need to know how to make discerning judgements in cyberspace according to sound moral criteria, and to use the new technology for their integral development and the benefit of others [§ 7] (Eilers, 2002: 62-72)

2.7.2 Church's concerns about the Internet

The document goes on to warn about the special dangers that the Internet poses. One is the presence of hate sites, devoted to defaming and attacking religious and ethnic groups, some attacking the Catholic Church itself. Like pornography and violence in the media, Internet hate sites are “reflections on the dark side of human nature marred by sin” [§ 8]. While the document upholds the right to freedom of expression, in the case

of hate sites it suggests self-regulation, and, when required, intervention by public authority. The second problem, the document points out, is the proliferation of websites that call themselves Catholic, which causes confusion among Catholics and for those searching for authentic sources of the faith. Because of the number of choices and services available on the Internet, they may have a spill over effect and encourage a “consumer approach to matters of faith” [§9]. Believers may end up picking and choosing what suits them, and end up with a selective adherence to church teachings. It also clearly states that:

Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood community. There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from the real-world interaction with other persons of faith [§ 9] (Quoted in Eilers,2002: 67).

But it suggests that the Internet can complement them, attract people to a fuller experience of the life of faith, and enrich the religious lives of users.

2.7.3 Church endorsing Internet use for religious purposes

The document concludes by exhorting and encouraging all members of the Church, its leaders, pastoral personnel, educators, parents and especially young people, to use the Internet creatively to meet their responsibility of helping to fulfil the mission of the Church. From the fairly detailed treatment of the Internet in this document it becomes evident that the Church is concerned about, as well as interested in, the uses of the Internet. It is aware of the challenges that this new technology poses to Church and society, and of the potential dangers, especially with regard to pornography, hate sites

and mis-information and distortion of beliefs. Yet it is committed to using the Internet and recommending its use to all categories of people.

Russell Shaw, writing online for *Crisis Magazine* (July-August 2001) on the 'Church and the Internet' felt that:

it would be good if, besides voicing concern about problems like cyberporn, the Vatican document takes a strong stand for freedom of political expression on the Net against totalitarian efforts to curb it." Russell concludes "Those who want this technical tool to be used for good and not left to cyber-libertarians and laissez-faire entrepreneurs should welcome the Vatican's determination to provide guidelines (<http://www.crisismagazine.com/julaug2001/feature5.htm>).

Lavinia Byrne in her 'Media and Theology Project Lecture 'God in Cyberspace,' wonders how an ethic can be brought to bear in the world of technology and communications. She asks whether Christianity has anything to offer the development of this ethic for the Internet? She is positive about the Internet offering believers new possibilities for faith. She proposes that:

It gives us a new metaphors for understanding God and the work of God.... The cyber-revolution demonstrates that God is as available to us as the unseen world of digits and that the work of God in underpinning our reality maybe just as powerful and omnipresent to the eye of faith....There is an ethic of trust to be discovered here and a theological underpinning to sustain us as we become cyber-travellers (http://www.div.ed.ac.uk/godincybersp_1.html).

The U.S Catholic Bishops Conference in their statement 'Your family and Cyberspace' (16-6-2000) acknowledge that religion can greatly benefit from the proper use of cyberspace, whether from handy services or from resources for scholarly research in a variety of church-related topics. They warn, however that "Cyberspace has become filled with a great deal of misleading or simply inaccurate information on the Church."

Guidelines were laid down and parents are asked to be vigilant in making the Internet safe for children's use. (<http://www.usccb.org/comm/cyberspace.htm>).

Conclusion

From the documents on World Communication Day referring to the Internet, and from the two main documents on the Internet, it is evident that the church is open and positive towards the Internet and fully endorses its use for religious purposes. Far from seeing the Internet merely as a tool, the church visualizes the Internet as the new environment in which a growing number of the world's population is living and interacting and believes it can be used for peace and the development of mankind. While aware of possible misuse and the harmful and possible negative consequences of Internet use, the Church rather than seeking to control or dictate how it should be used, offers suggestions and guidelines for believers. The Church does not abandon its traditional role as guardian of faith and morals, and it upholds the criteria of truth, the dignity of the human person and the common good as the yardstick for healthy use. While aware of its potential problems, the Church defends the freedom of the net and the right to information for all and believes the net can give a voice to the voiceless. While the vision and the policy of the Church with regard to the Internet are clear, it remains to be seen how far the policy of the church has been implemented, and whether this message has been received by its followers, from the hierarchy to the ranks of the laity. The following exploration of sample religious websites will provide an insight on who has implemented the directives of the Church, to what extent this implementation has taken place.

2.8 Implementation of the Church's vision and policy

2.8.1 Vatican Website

While we have observed that the Church's hierarchy has made many pronouncements about the use of new media for religious purposes, it would seem that these recommendations have not been fully implemented by Bishops' Conferences in different parts of the world. However, it has to be affirmed that the Vatican itself has implemented its own policy and created the necessary structures needed for its implementation and support. The Vatican launched the official website of the Catholic Church in 1997 with 1,200 pages. Today the site contains about 40,000 pages, which by the end of September 2002 had been accessed 159 million times.

The Catholic Times reported that the site's directors have taken some of the first tentative steps towards interactivity, a feature of cyber-society that often is taken for granted, but for the Vatican, represents a host of challenges and risks. Though the recent Vatican documents have stressed the need for the Church to embrace the new media, the "Vatican's historical caution and Italian styled bureaucracy" have slowed its entry into the Internet age (*The Catholic Times*, London:10-11-2002). Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, head of the office in charge of the Vatican website announced plans for a "great Catholic portal" that would offer Internet surfers a unique "encounter with the Catholic Church." The archbishop said the new overhauled site is expected to have a two pronged entrance: The first drawing on the Vatican teaching authority, and a second area that will

have an evangelization emphasis and be more dynamic and interactive.

(<http://www.vatican.va>)

If one explores the Vatican site, one is immediately struck by the abundance of information that is available on its pages. This is a remarkable change from the days when one would have to go through great pains to obtain any official information on the Church's teachings and doctrine. Another advantage of the site is that, since it is the official site, the contents are credible and surfers need not worry about authentic Catholic doctrine. However, most of the material is textual and the site does not utilize the full potential of the Internet and its multimedia capabilities. What has been a lacuna is the lack of interactivity that the Vatican itself is aware of and is trying to remedy through its future plans. While the document had suggested that the Internet could be used to empower the laity and create public opinion, the site itself provides no space for interaction and it is hoped that this will be remedied in the new Vatican site that is in its planning stage.

2.8.2 Internet for Catholic News and Information

One of the most prolific uses of the Internet is for the supplying information by Catholic news agencies, both at the international, (<http://www.zenit.org/english/>), national (<http://www.cbcisite.com/index.html>) and diocesan level (<http://www.archway.org.my/mindex.Asp>). Zenit is an International News Agency which provides objective coverage

of events and issues concerning the Catholic Church. Its articles are reproduced in hundreds of publications worldwide and are used by numerous radio and TV stations. Catholic Online, located at www.catholic.org, gives easy access to comprehensive information about Catholicism, and provides a range of methods to integrate faith into daily life. Catholic Online provides over five million pages of content, including the largest online historical and biblical database about the Catholic Church. It reaches a highly targeted audience of over 100,000 users per day and up to 10 million pages per day with 50 million hits. Users are from over 120 countries around the world. (<http://www.catholic.org/about/about.shtml>).

Catholic World News, a daily and weekly summary news service, provides news, interviews, in-depth stories and articles of interest to Catholics, especially those in the United States (<http://www.cwnnews.com/>) Noel Bruyns' Cyberchurch publishes a list of websites that focus on religious news around the world, which is published by *The Southern Cross*. (<http://www.thesoutherncross.co.za/cyberchurch/index.htm>). From Asia, UCANews offers news about, and of interest to, the Church in Asia. It also offers free access to the UCAN daily service, six-language services and UCAN archives (<http://www.ucanews.com/html/ucan/index.html>).

The Archdiocese of Mumbai, India, has its own archdiocesan newsletter *The Examiner*, which completed fifteen decades of its existence in July 2004, and which has, for the last few years published an online edition as well catering to its online readers (<http://www.the-examiner.org>). From the number of websites that publish catholic news, one can conclude that there is a great demand for news and information of and about the

church and this is perhaps the Internet's most popular use for religious purposes. It could also point to a growing hunger for knowledge that satisfies a deeper need, and which is not being met by traditional sources of religious information.

2.8.3 Religious Orders recruiting on the Internet

With vocations to the priesthood and sisterhood declining in recent years, many traditional religious orders are making use of the latest technological resources to publicise their activities. While traditional orders continue to recruit vocations through the print media or through direct contact, some of the best-known and venerable orders are now trying newer ways of attracting interested persons. In Ireland, for example, www.vocationsireland.com contains information on the Augustinians, Carmelites and the Dominicans, and a number of religious orders. The webmaster and vocation promoter believes the website has been doing well, with nearly 80 percent of the inquiry calls coming via the Internet. The Carmelite Order has its own site, relating not only to vocations but to the work of the order, its origins and history. The Dominican novices too have their presence on the Internet. Their site (www.op.org/novices) enables browsers to find out about the novices' progress in their studies, community life, and the main aspects of the order, as well as offering a virtual trip around the premises. The novice master, can be contacted for the biographies and photographs of the young students and those of previous classes.

Another site that seeks to promote religious vocations is run by the Association of Religious Vocation Personnel (ARVP). The website aims to offer information and guidance about the opportunities that are available. Links can be made to communities and organizations that offer a wide variety of experiences of services and prayers. The site also offers articles and stories about ways to approach complex decisions in life. (http://www.godknowswhere.org.uk/intro_frameset.html) A vocations resource Web site has recently begun offering its visitors the chance to register online their hours of Eucharistic adoration for vocations. The site also offers a range of resources to young people considering vocations and all Catholics interested in promoting and fostering vocations. Legionary of Christ, Father Anthony Bannon, responds personally to the questions sent to the site. A selection of 350 questions and answers are available for browsing. The Legionaries and the Regnum Christi Movement sponsor the site (www.vocation.com).

The use of the Internet to promote vocations is perhaps one of the creative uses of this new technology as it uses the anonymity of Internet to its advantage. Perhaps the creators of the vocations websites, while aware of the vocations crisis in the church, are also aware that vocations are a delicate personal issue and, while people may feel called to the priesthood or religious life, they are very unsure whether they really have a vocation. The website not only provides the safety of anonymity while they explore possibilities, but it also provides all the basic information without any risk. The number of users who have been helped testifies to its potential use.

2.8.4 Internet for prayer

The Jesuits who set up the Sacred Space website (<http://www.jesuit.ie/prayer/>) in Ireland were among the first to work on to the potential of the Internet for prayerful reflection.

An introductory note on the website states:

It might seem strange to pray at your computer, in front of a screen, especially if there are other people around you, or distracting noises. But God is everywhere, all around us, constantly reaching out to us, even in the most unlikely situations. When we know this, and with a bit of practice, we can pray anywhere! (<http://www.jesuit.ie/prayer/#outline>)

Their well laid out site, which gets an average of 7000 hits a day from all over the world, uses the net to guide people through prayer. It means computer users have prayer brought to their desktops. Although Catholic by inspiration, SacredSpace is profoundly ecumenical. One of the Sacred Space launch team, Fr. Peter Scally, summed up the main idea in this way:

A person at the computer has a sense of privacy and intimacy; comfortable upright and attentive, subconsciously screening out all distractions, he concentrates on the screen –gazes, in fact on the screen. What better description of the attitude of attentive listening to God? (*The Tablet*, January 18, 2003)

SacredSpace has received positive feedback from a young man in Singapore: “I came to work overseas,” he wrote, and now I feel that my world is empty if I don’t go into SacredSpace. It has helped me a lot, most especially here in this country with different faiths and cultures” (*The Universe*, Sunday March 3, 2002). Ollie Wilson, reporting in *The Catholic Times*, London, points out the professional manner in which the Irish Jesuits have planned, executed and marketed their venture. The Sacred Space team in

Ireland spent thousands of pounds on advertising, in Irish national newspapers and on the sides of Dublin buses, to promote their project knowing it would generate large amounts of free publicity. (*The Catholic Times, London, April 27, 2003*). Dioceses, religious institutions and even individuals have their web pages dedicated to prayer (<http://landru.i-link-2.net/shnyves/prayer.html>) and which appear to attract a lot of net users who would otherwise perhaps not bother to pray.

Cashing in on the need to pray, websites have been constructed as chapels and shrines for prayer (<http://www.cathnews.com/chapel/prayer.html>). These sites offer novel as well as traditional prayer aids, meditation helps, visuals for contemplation and music to enhance the spiritual experience. Daily Prayer Online, an Australian initiative, offers a quiet space, a prayer for the classroom, a thought for the day, a spirituality feature and even a 'prayertoon' to cater for different spiritual needs (<http://churchresources.info/pray/>). Talk2God is a site which imaginatively offers activities and aids to meet children's prayer needs. (<http://www.talk2god.ie/>). The Monastery of Christ in the Desert offers the visitor an opportunity of seeking God in the silence of the monastery, of listening to the Abbot's Homily, or of joining the monks in chanting their prayers (<http://www.christdesert.org/pax.html>).

Using the Internet to pray taps into one of the deepest needs of human beings, and research done in the U.S., as we have observed, Barna Research 2001 and the Pew Research 2003, has shown that the net has found users praying on the net. The appeal of the Internet for prayer is perhaps understandable, not only because it provides the user

with the privacy needed for one's personal prayer, but also because the multimedia approach to prayer, offered by many of these websites makes prayer more stimulating than a mental exercise. Incidentally, the official Church has not commented on online prayer and cyber chapels and still prefers believers to use traditional places of worship and prayer.

2.8.5 Internet for Religious Studies

The Internet has also been used for theological studies. The Theological Library on the Internet has 39 Catholic directories (<http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/dir.htm>). The Spring Hill Jesuit College has its own theological library with 89 sites on topics like: Church, Revelation, Liturgy, Justice, Morality, Spirituality, Evangelization, (<http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/index.htm>) The Roman Theological Forum is an association of scholars working for the advancement of theology and philosophy within the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. It addresses contemporary questions of theology and philosophy, starting from a Thomist point of view, and giving special attention to neo-Patristic approaches to the interpretation of Sacred Scripture (<http://rtforum.org>).

The number of theological sites freely available on the Internet has grown and augurs well for an educated laity in the Church of the future. The Catholic Encyclopedia offers an enormous resource of over 11,000 articles online and can be easily accessed by topic and is printer-friendly (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>). One problem with studying theology online is that the genuineness of the theological literature on the Internet cannot

be authenticated unless there are resources available in print. Theological and Biblical Institutes are beginning to offer courses online and to publish books and articles on relevant studies. Lund Theological Books, Cambridge (<http://lundbooks.co.uk/>), Sea of Faith Network UK (<http://www.sofn.org.uk/>), and Pacifica, Australasian Theological Studies are some of the sites that are offering resources online. Cardinal Castrillon Hoyo, Prefect of the Commission for the Clergy, offers live web-casts of theological conferences with speakers in studios around the world at http://www.clerus.org/index_eng.html (*Catholic Times*, London 10-11-2002).

Using the Internet for studying religion is one of the avenues pointed out in the document *Church and Internet*, and it caters for the believer's need to deepen and understand their faith. By bringing out myriads of Catholic resources from the seclusion of religious houses and libraries, and offering on-line bible courses and distance education courses to lay theologians, the net has boosted the cause of religion. As mentioned earlier by Frances Cairncross, the net has hastened the death of distance, which, in turn, has brought previously inaccessible religious knowledge within reach of the interested laity.

2.8.6 Internet for Online Homily Aids

Not all preachers are gifted, and there are moments when they are hard pressed for time because of other unexpected commitments. *The Catholic Times*, London, reported that the website www.lastminutensermon.com is a unique service for busy Christian ministers

and teachers, offering sermons based on Biblical texts and themes (*The Catholic Times*, April 20, 2003). The company says that by using last-minute sermons, ministers and preachers from a variety of Christian traditions can now use well researched and topical sermons at short notice, or facilitate the activities of study groups. The *Catholic Times* columnist, Fr. John Littleton, sounded a note of warning about using ready made sermons

There is a real need for the preacher to internalise the message that he is going to preach: and this cannot be done successfully unless the preacher struggles with the message of the word of God in his own life. The danger with using sample sermons in an uncritical fashion is that preachers will lack conviction and sincerity in what they say (*The Catholic Times*, London, April 20, 2003).

There are a host of providers of liturgical aids: Sunday Sermons, 'Catholic Homilies' (<http://www.catholicsermons.com/>), and Sunday Sermons Illustrations (<http://www.ozsermonillustrations.com/>). The 'Text This Week', (<http://www.textweek.com/>), weekly 'Sunday Reflections' (<http://www.netforlife.net/SR.htm>), and daily and seasonal homilies (<http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily.html>), meet the needs of preachers and also of lay leaders.

2.8.7 Evangelization on the Internet

John Paul II called the Internet a remarkable means for evangelization. Inaugurating the Pontifical Mission Society's U.S website, he hoped that

the new site would draw many people to a deeper faith in Christ, lead to an increase of missionary vocations, and call forth a greater commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel and the new evangelization of traditionally Christian countries (Zenit.org 23rd.Feb.2003).

According to a Pew Internet & American Life Project study, conducted in August-September 2001, one in four adult Internet users in the USA, or 28 million, go online for religious or spiritual information (Pew Internet and American Life Project 2002). Ollie Wilson speaking about 'Internet and Evangelization' points out its advantages.

Those with a quiet shy interest in the Church can dip a tentative toe in the water of our faith before they feel ready to go to Mass or visit a catholic bookshop. And as the internet becomes more interactive, the possibilities for subtle online evangelisation are enhanced. A comprehensive website called askapriest.com might take some considerable effort to setup but the benefits could be huge. It could provide online succour for troubled people. (*Catholic Times, London, April 27:2003*)

Every morning, more than 1,300 South Koreans -- Catholics, Protestants and Buddhists - - receive simple spiritual advice by e-mail. Father Matthew Cho Myeong-yeo, started his service in July 2001, by adding to his e-mail directory the names of those wishing to receive such advice. The service, entitled "Good News," is on the Web site of the Seoul Archdiocese, and is one of the most visited sites in the country. Surprisingly, about 60 percent of South Korea's population over age 6 uses the Internet at least once a month (ZENIT.org-Fides March 2, 2003).

Another evangelical use of the Internet is blogging -doing web logs. This Internet trend in personal journalism is connecting Catholics all over the United States. Catholics are blogging on the Internet to evangelize, writes Tim Drake online in the *National Catholic Register* (12-6-2002). Drake points out how some Catholics use blogging. Pete Vere, a defender of the bond for the marriage tribunal says: "Blogging allows me to interact with average catholics and address their concerns pertaining to canon law." Jeanine Webb, a 70-year-old grandmother from Eugene, Oregon says:

What a blessing and inspiration Catholic blogging has been....Eugene is the capital of alternative-lifestyle types, so it's been reassuring to be able to read and communicate with faith-filled, active, intelligent people of my faith (http://www.catholic.net/sowing_seeds/print.phtml?article_id=484).

Using the Internet for evangelization, either through websites or blogs, taps the interactive potential of the Internet. Often, net surfers are not passive users of the Internet and interacting with other users as they discuss questions of faith and share their perspective on faith questions, opens up new possibilities for the Church's use of the Internet as it makes the faith quest a personal as well as communitarian experience.

2.8.8. Individuals use the Internet for religious purposes

While a large number of Catholic websites have been hosted by religious orders, institutions and organizations, there have been new initiatives pioneered by individuals, who have combined their faith commitment and technological skills to produce websites to promote and propagate their faith. A quadriplegic priest, Fr. Luis de Moya, has carved out an apostolate on Internet.

Father Luis de Moya lost the use of his limbs in an accident more than a decade ago, but he manages to run the web site, that opposes euthanasia, through technology that allows him to dictate to a computer.... He also has, in Spanish, a Web page on spirituality, philosophy and theology (www.fluvium.org) and a personal page (www.luisdemoya.org) (Zenit.org-Fides July15, 2003).

Holy Spirit Interactive, an online faith initiative was launched on January 1st 2004 by Aneel Aranha, an Indian Catholic, working in the Middle East. The main aim of the site was to strengthen the faith of Christians (specifically Catholics) by educating them about

the teachings of the Catholic Church, and by providing a prayer support base for those in need. In an email, Aneel writes of the progress of this website.

There are over sixteen columnists writing regularly for the site. There are over 6,000 pages of information currently on-line. There are nearly 10,000 subscribers to the newsletter, which goes out each week, highlighting updates to the site. There are nearly 60,000 visitors to the site each month. Most visitors are from the US, followed closely by India and the UAE (E-mail dated 22-10-2004). (<http://www.holyspiritinteractive.net/>)

Catholic Goan Network (CGN) is a network of Catholic Goans, who are committed to the Catholic faith and their Goan heritage, for the benefit and welfare of the Catholic Goan Community around the world. CGN is an initiative of a Goan, Patrick de Souza, settled in Maryland U.S.A, and launched on 15th August 2000. The stated mission of the online network is:

to have a medium of exchange for all that we truly believe in; We strive to assist one another in our spiritual quest for grace and salvation....to share religious experiences, pray with and for one another through circles of prayer, and exchange information on miraculous appearances, events and other occurrences (<http://www.catholic-goan-network.net/index.shtml>).

Catholic websites designed and hosted by catholic individuals point to the potential of the Internet for participation by the laity, often a silent majority in the Church. While the document on the Internet has encouraged the use of the Internet for interaction with the laity and for creating public opinion in the Church, *de facto* most Church websites do not offer any significant space for the laity to express their point of view. The growth of Catholic websites run by the laity could signal their desire to express themselves and participate more fully in matters of faith and practice.

2.8.9 Indian Church uses the Internet

Catholic Bishops Conference of India Website

The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) hosted its first website in 2001 in its attempt to publicise the activities of the coordinating body, the CBCI, Centre and the various commissions and departments of this apex body of the Catholic Church in India (www.cbcisite.com). The website was reorganized and hosted in a new format in the middle of 2002. It aims to inform all those interested in the Catholic Church in India, which has a following of 16 million, of the 23 million Christians, of the vision and mission of the Church in India, the activities it engages in, the services it provides and the church's concern and response to the significant happenings in India as they affect the life of its people. The site claims to be updated on a daily basis and has been reorganized in 2004. The Bishops Conference has launched a new "News Website" (www.theindiancatholic.com) giving more details about the Church in India.

Archdiocese of Mumbai website

The website of the Archdiocese of Mumbai was set up in October 2000 by the Communications office of the Archdiocese, and it is the official site of the Archdiocese. The website hoped to address the need for information in the Archdiocese, the formation of public opinion in matters of faith, as well as matters relating to the Archdiocese. In terms of feedback received, the Communications office felt that people were generally positive about the setting up of the website and believed the Church in Mumbai was keeping up with new technologies. The office has plans for the future and aims to enhance the interactivity of the website by offering a chat room and maybe starting a newsgroup. It also desires to get visitors to contribute their views and comments to the website (<http://www.archbom.org/>). The official newsletter of the Archdiocese, *The Examiner*, is available on the net (<http://www.the-examiner.org/>).

Conclusion

This chapter has established the extent to which research studies have been carried out on the use of the Internet for religious purposes, by different religions, in general, and by the Catholic Church, in particular. It also pointed out the new area of research in which this particular study is interested in and the reasons for its originality. As a background to the study of the religious use/non use of the Internet in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, India, an exploration was undertaken into the attitudes, policy and practice of the Catholic Church in its relationship to the media. The response of the Church to the challenges posed by the media could have a particular significance for the study of the response of the Church to the Internet.

After seeing the Church's stance on the Internet and its teaching, endorsing the use of the Internet for religious purposes, religious websites were reviewed to examine how the Church's policy on the Internet was being implemented in practice. This review revealed that, by and large, the Internet has been mostly used for the spreading of religious news, teaching, as an aid to religious studies, and the practices of the faith. Most Catholic websites have been sponsored by official bodies responsible for Church organizations and institutions, but are run with lay expertise in web technology. However, individual Catholics have begun to make their presence felt on the web, through their own websites. The following chapter will deal with an overview of India, reasons for locating the research in Mumbai and methods and tools used in the Archdiocese of Mumbai to explore whether or not Catholics are using the Internet for religious purposes.

Chapter 3 India and the Internet / Focus Groups research

Introduction

Having examined the nature of the Internet, how it operates and its possible influence on society, and after exploring the Internet and its relationship to religion and to the Catholic Church in particular, the first part of this chapter looks at the Indian scenario to see whether the Internet is influencing present-day India and its religious practices in any way. This will provide the immediate background for the research, since this study will verify whether and how the Internet is being used for religious purposes by Catholics in Mumbai, India. The second part deals with the methodology used for the research, namely focus groups, why they were used and how they were utilized for the research. The third part deals with the actual findings of the focus groups.

Part I The Internet and its evolution in India

While the influence of the Internet on India may still be marginal, there is no doubt that it is rapidly spreading. To situate the potential influence of the Internet in India, we shall briefly analyse salient features of its socio-economic development and of its mass media.

India is an unusual setting in which to analyse the communications revolution. While the new communication technologies of cable television, computers, the Internet, satellite and telecommunications are impacting Indian society in dramatic ways, the subcontinent is still a developing nation in which many citizens depend on the bullock cart for transportation and on human labour for making a daily living (Singhal and Rogers, 2001:19).

3.1.1 Socio-economic situation

India remains, by and large, an agricultural economy with nearly 70% of the population living in about 580,000 villages. Although the British colonial power developed infrastructure like railways and roads, the country as a whole remained poor. After independence in 1947, India tried to grow into an industrial economy following the lead given by industrial countries in Europe and by the Soviet Union. These efforts failed and only succeeded in increasing unemployment and mass migration from the villages to the cities. After independence, India's literacy rate increased from 18 to 62 percent. However, 46 percent of the population, 15 years of age and above, is illiterate. India has more university students than any other nation in the world today, but also the most illiterates (Singhal & Rogers, 2001). Several national plans on education have not succeeded in making India a literate nation. India reached a population of one billion inhabitants in the year 2002 and of these 700 million are young people.

The Internet Economy of India states that in the Telecom Industry sector India had a tele-density in 1998 of only 2.2 percent as compared with the U.K. of 55.64 percent and the U.S with 66.13 percent (Manzar et al:2001). Kalam and Pillai, in their introduction to *Envisioning an Empowered Nation*, point out that "the current GDP growth rate is only 4.5 %, the population below the poverty line is 26 % and unemployment is 30 %. This situation needs to change" (2004: xxiii). India's economic growth still largely depends on agriculture. The first green revolution was aimed at making India self-sufficient, and this was achieved in 1970. However, feeding India's growing millions

has proved to be a constant challenge. The second green revolution emphasized the training of farmers and the use of new technologies.

In the decade 1990-2000, India's economic growth rate has coincided with the economic liberalization which was undertaken. In the 1980s, 70 percent of the people were in agriculture. This figure had decreased to 65 percent by 1994, and is expected to fall to 60 percent by 2012. Industries employed 13 percent of the population in 1980. The number is expected to increase to 16 percent by 2012. In the service industries, the knowledge component has increased from 17 percent in 1980 to 20 percent in 1994, and will further increase to 24 percent by 2012 (Kalam and Pillai:2004). Telephone ownership is relatively low, but the 650,000 public call offices (PCO) which dot the Indian landscape bring the benefits of telephony to non-owners. By 2000, over half of India's 600,000 villages had access to reliable telephone services with some 50,000 new villages being connected each year.

Mobile telephony services along with pager services were introduced in India in 1995. India had over 14.17 million mobile phone subscribers by May, 2003, about 102.8 per cent more than the previous year. Industry experts predict that mobile phone users are expected to rise to over 120 million by 2008, making this telecommunication sector one of the most lucrative markets for global mobile phone manufacturers and cell phone providers. The main players in the cellular market include Bharti Tele-Ventures Ltd, Idea Cellular Ltd, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd., and Reliance India Mobile. ([http://www.indianchild.com/mobile_phone_manufacturers .htm](http://www.indianchild.com/mobile_phone_manufacturers.htm)).

3.1.2 Vision for projected economic development

Socio-economic development can be described as

a widely participatory process of directed social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining more control over their environment (Singal and Rogers,1989:15).

To support this process, communications would need to create a climate favourable for development. In 2002, the Prime Minister said that India would become a developed nation by the year 2020. The 10th five-year plan focuses on economic growth of 8% and an employment potential of one hundred million. The nation is self-sufficient in food production and the development of the health sector has brought about an increase in life expectancy. It is believed that technology is capable of playing a dominant role in improving the quality of life and is capable of spearheading the nation towards growth and prosperity.

India has witnessed an impressive growth in information technology sector, which is making its mark in the software export business, a business that accounts for more than 10 billion dollars per annum, despite the ebb in the last few years of the new millennium. The National Association of Software and Service Companies, NASSCOM believes that India's rapid growth in the IT industry owes much to the support received from a robust infrastructure of telecom, power and roads that the government has developed recently. Similarly, the industry owes much to the large human resource available in the country.

Every year, approximately, 2.1 million graduates and 0.3 million post-graduates pass out of India's non-engineering colleges. While 2.5-3 percent of them find jobs in other fields or pursue further studies abroad, the rest opt for employment in the IT industry. The last five years has seen a tremendous growth in Tech Parks that are geared to meet the requirements of the knowledge industry and offer Silicon Valley type infrastructure ...right here in India. (<http://www.nasscom.org/advantageIndia.asp>)

In 2004, a group of experts put together a Technology Vision for 2020, providing a framework and a roadmap for creating a developed India by the year 2020. The first area envisaged is agriculture and agro-food processing, aimed primarily at the rural people that will maintain self-sufficiency in line with population growth, as well as leading to economic growth. The next area that needs to be tackled is industry, as it provides employment and has potential for creating wealth for the individual and the country. The third sector in the development plan is education, aiming at 100% literacy, especially women's education and health care, aiming at population-control and health for all. Information and communication technology is one of the core areas where India has expertise and a competitive edge that needs further exploitation (Kalam and Pillai, 2004:18-27).

This vision of India, as a developed nation in 2020, is based on the belief that in this 21st century India is entering into an economy where knowledge is the primary resource rather than capital or labour. By an efficient utilization of existing ancient and modern knowledge, India can improve the quality of life for all its citizens, in the form of better health, education, infrastructure and other social indicators. The growth and prosperity of this knowledge economy will depend on the ability of India to create and maintain a

knowledge society infrastructure, increase the knowledge of workers, and enhance their productivity, through the creation, growth and exploitation of new knowledge.

There has been a healthy growth in the number of India's IT professionals over the last decade. From a base of 6,800 knowledge workers in 1985-86, the number increased to 522,000 software and services professionals by the end of 2001-02. It is estimated that out of these 522,000 knowledge workers, almost 170,000 are working in the IT software and services export industry; nearly 106,000 are working in the IT enabled services and over 220,000 in user organizations (<http://www.nasscom.org/advantageIndia.asp>).

The vision of an empowered nation, put together by Kalam and Pillai, is indeed a challenging one. It gains significance from the fact that it has been drawn up and promoted by India's first citizen, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, one of India's most illustrious scientists, well versed in information technology. What makes this vision even more credible is the fact that Kalam has been the architect of indigenous development of satellite launch vehicles and strategic missiles, chairman of a team of 500 technology experts as well as a professor of technology and social transformation. Dr. A.S.Pillai, an electrical engineer by profession who co-authored the book, is also a distinguished scientist and an honorary professor of many institutions and a member of many professional bodies.

Drawing on India's success stories in the field of space, missiles, agriculture and technology and the large manpower resource available in the country, Kalam and Pillai feel that the vision is in the realm of the possible. However, various responsibilities for implementation of the plan are not dealt with and how the diverse strengths of the country will be integrated is not fully spelt out. Kalam and Pillai base their hopes for the

implementation of this plan on the collaboration and cooperation of all citizens of India, especially the youth.

But, if the past four decades post independence are any indication, a lesson to be drawn is the fact that a significant number (especially urbanites) of youth in the country, have been dreaming of going abroad at the earliest. The successes of IT professionals, especially in globalised economies have only accelerated the trend. So, unless a challenging environment is created within the country, this growing talent could contribute both in technology development (abroad) and delivery (operating from India for MNCs) more to developed nations. (The Hindu, Internet Edition, 22-3-2004)

While there is no doubt that India will benefit from its IT ventures, whether it succeeds in its vision will depend on how it creates and utilizes knowledge in IT, industry, agriculture, healthcare, education and other critical sectors. The Government of India Finance Minister Shri P. Chidambaram, in a Press Information Bureau release on April 17, 2005, talking about achieving Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) in India stated:

India as a country seems to be comfortably on track for meeting the MDG in terms of reducing poverty thanks to its high growth performance during the 1990s. Education and literacy are the weak links in the performance of the Indian economy. Health also requires greater attention in India. Progress on provision of drinking water in both rural and urban areas during the 1990s has been satisfactory in the country. From the data available it is evident that significant progress has been achieved by India in relation to poverty, health and education related indicators. Given the trend in economic growth during the Tenth Plan period (2002-2007), the poverty ratio is expected to decline further (<http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=8621>).

3.1.3 Salient features of the media scene in India

In any examination of the media scene in India, two factors need to be kept in mind: the first is that a large section of the Indian populace live in villages, and the second, that a large section of the Indian population remains illiterate. Being predominantly rural, the favoured communication has been direct one-to-one and one-to-many in group relationships. In cultural terms, the favourite forms of expression have been music, song and dance and theatre. These cultural forms have remained almost unchanged and are still popular with people in the villages, as well as with the many who have migrated to towns and cities. These traditional forms also find their expression in the various media. While India has a flourishing and free press, and while radio broadcasting has been popular in the villages, TV and Cinema have had the greatest appeal to the masses.

Press

India publishes more daily papers than any other country in Asia, covering a range of languages and cultural diversity that is found nowhere else except in the Soviet Union. Over the years, print publications have grown in India. The magazine boom occurred in the late 1970s because of improvements in printing technology and the sale of commercial advertising, which greatly enhanced the sales of magazines. In the late 80s and 90s, Indian newspapers underwent some changes in order to compete with the rise of television. According to the NRS survey in 1999, the print media acquired 17 million more readers than the previous year (Frontline, October 8, 1999). In 2000, there were 27,000 newspapers and magazines published in India published in 93 languages (Singal

and Rogers 2001). However between 2002 and 2003 readership dropped from 55,00,000 to 44,00,000 according to the NRS 2003 survey. Among the regional languages, Hindi has the biggest readership.

The findings of the National Readership Survey show that a fourth of the adult population of India can be reached by the print media, while half of the population can be reached by television. The all India Readership both urban and rural of age group 12 year + stands at 24.5 percent (NRS 2003).

An innovation in the newspapers in the last couple of years is "page three," meaning the city supplements and their daily coverage of the parties of the rich and famous. Page three has become a social category as much as a media slot. In Delhi and Bombay, celebrities are known as "page-three people," and a new Bollywood film devoting itself to the phenomenon is called *Page Three*. (<http://www.cjr.org/issues/2005/2/deb-letter-delhi.asp>)

Radio

Radio Broadcasting began in India in 1923, during the British colonial period. At India's independence there were only six radio stations in India, broadcasting from the metropolitan cities.

By 2000, broadcasts of All India Radio (now part of India's Prasar Bharati Corporation) programs were heard in 110 million households (two-thirds of all Indian households) in 24 languages and 146 dialects. After a slow start in the late 1990s, FM radio is coming of age in the new millennium (Singhal and Rogers, 2001:55).

As the Indian population is largely illiterate and in the villages, radio has a special appeal to them and has a mass following. It is more affordable by the masses and the

broadcasts can be tailored to local events. Of the radio channels, the main channel, All India Radio, has the biggest reach, going out to 20 percent of those who have a radio, followed by Vividh Bharati, the commercial channel, which is listened to by 15 percent, and last comes FM radio, with 7 percent. If one looked at urban India, radio penetration is 21.5 percent, the most popular radio programme being Hindi film songs and the most popular radio station broadcast being the local AIR. National Readership Survey of 2003 revealed that the onset of FM Radio has given the radio sector a boost (NRS 2003).

Television

Television was introduced to India as an experimental education service in Delhi in 1959, with regular daily broadcasts beginning six years later.

In 2000 500 million Indians (50 percent of the population) watch television regularly. Doordarshan broadcasts some 20 channels by satellite and its 1000 ground transmitters to provide potential access to about 90 percent of India's population. Some 40 private television networks are currently broadcasting (Singal and Rogers 2001:84).

Television (53.4 percent) (Urban and rural viewership in 1 week) remains the prime medium of the people, with Cable and Satellite TV viewership at 20.4 percent (NRS 2003). 48.6 million urban households, or 69 % own TV sets. In the rural areas, 123 million people watch TV, mostly through community sets. Of the 48.6 million urban households, 15 million also have satellite and cable TV. This is a significant increase from 1995, when only 9.3 million households had satellite and cable TV. The TV channel most watched all over the country is DD I. (NRS 2003).

When the government of India decided to introduce television, one of the reasons put forward was that it had tremendous potential for development, that it could be used as a

means of information and education of the masses, especially of India's large illiterate population. However, today's television is dominated by entertainment. Soap operas and other entertainment programmes appear to be the main reason for its rapid diffusion. In 1975, India had the biggest Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in the world, that constituted a country-wide classroom.

SITE was a one-year pilot project in 1975-76 using NASA's ATS-6 satellite to broadcast directly to satellite-receiving dishes in 2,400 Indian villages in order to reach tens of millions of rural people, most of whom watched television for the first time (Singhal and Rogers, 2001:85).

But entertainment has captured television, especially since the mid-1990s. After the initial success of the first tele-serial *Hum Log* (We, the People), the Hindu religious epics like *Ramayana* ushered in a new era, where ratings became the new criterion of success in terms of advertising and sponsorship, which have made television the most attractive commercial media proposition. The policy debate about the role of television in development has been forgotten and instead of spearheading development of the masses, television is now serving commercial interests, primarily of the elite middle class, who want more entertainment and fewer educational programmes. The life style of the rich and famous, the values of a fast-paced modern society, with all the trappings of wealth, comfort and pleasure offered by TV, further increase the divide between the rich and the poor in the country.

Another trend that needs to be mentioned is the growth of religious programming on television, especially on Cable & Satellite. Religious ethos has always been part of the country and from television's early days religion has been depicted in religious epics, lives of saints and sages, the battle between good and evil and, more recently, in

religious devotions and discourses offered almost daily as part of the regular programming. The success of television serials based on Hindu mythology revived religious programming in the late 1980s.

Character types recognizable from these same religious sources are constantly recycled in different plots: the loyal, devoted wife (Sita), the playful hero (Krishna), the upright hero (Rama), the loyal companion (Hanuman and Lakshmana), the powerful villain (Ravana) (Derne, 1995:199).

Though Hindu religious programmes are more widespread on Satellite channels, other religions, like Sikhism, Buddhism, and Christianity, also have programmes. The apparently systematic use of Hindu religious programming must be seen against the background of Hindu religious revival and a rabid Hindu fundamentalism that fomented an anti-minorities wave, especially against Muslims. The implications of religious Television programming on the Internet will be examined later.

Cinema

No discussion on the Indian media can be complete without mentioning the film industry. Popularly referred to as Bollywood, it produces more films than Hollywood and gives India the distinction of being the largest film-producing country in the world. Indian films offer a glimpse of Indian culture and a cultural scenario of what India is been up to the present moment. Dance and music are the first love of the Indian masses, and thus have become an essential ingredient of almost every popular film. Filmstars are role models, and films offer an escape into a fantasy world, which has exerted a real influence on contemporary culture. Politicians in some states were elected primarily

because they were well-known popular film idols. Writing in *Popular Indian Cinema* Gokulsing and Dissanayake state that:

Today it is the dominant form of entertainment in India. Of its 900 million people, an average of ten million moviegoers (the population of London) buy tickets every day to watch their favourite stars. Some of the audience 'often pay a whole day's earnings to sit in the dark for three hours' (2003:10).

Many writers on Indian cinema have underlined the important role that Indian films have played in projecting present day India.

For example, according to Mira Reym Binford (1989), the Hindi film has been seen by some as a unifier and a means by which Indian self, the Indian family, historically shaped patterns of behaviour, including belief systems and scale of values, are adapting to modern society (Gokulsing and Dissanayaka, 1998:11).

Indian films mirror the reality of India today as well as help to create the India of tomorrow. From the earliest films, mythological narratives of the actions of gods and goddesses became a feature of Indian films in the way the Western is part of Hollywood. This mythological genre still retains its mass appeal. Although television has lessened the cinema habit, only 7 percent go to the cinema once a month, – (NRS 2003), yet television and cinema have mutually enriched each other as films can be watched on TV from the comfort of the home. The influence of cinema on television is seen in the number of full-length films that are part of daily TV programming, and in the channels (Zee Cinema, Star Movies) dedicated exclusively to films.

3.1.4 Internet Growth in India

India is a unique setting for the study of the growth of the Internet because while the usage of the Internet is growing in metro cities and the main towns, India still lives in its

villages. The development of electronic communications networks was given a low priority and the World Wide Web was little known even in the mid-nineties. The scenario is slowly changing and Internet usage has grown at an exponential rate. By mid-1999, India had 25,000 IT technicians mainly based in Hyderabad, Bangalore, New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai working for US, European, and East Asian companies in remote-processing work, generating \$250 million in sales revenue. The National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) estimates that, by 2008, remote processing will employ 1.1 million Indians, earning revenue of over \$13 billion, a 52-fold increase in 10 years (Mukerjea and Dhavan:1999). Among all the countries in Asia, with the exception of China, India appears to be taking rapid strides in information technology, and the Internet is seen as the most promising means for India to advance and prosper in the twenty-first century.

Although the growth during 2003 has been better than previous years, the gap with China remains. During 2000, China had 14 million Internet users while India had 3 million Internet users. Over the last three years, China's Internet subscriber base has grown to 18 million while India's has grown to 7.5 million.(Times News Network, 16-2-04) (<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-498269,curpg-1.cms>)

Cyber-café usage

Relatively few Indians can afford home PCs, so millions go online in the nation's crowded Internet cafes, enjoying their low cost and anonymity. The cyber-cafes are the in-thing for the young, who prefer to surf the net in a social setting. In a March 2000 online study of Cyber-cafes in Mumbai, Parekh and Sawant reported that:

....about ten percent of the cyber cafes have users ranging from eighty to one hundred seventy per day. In one-third of the cyber cafes women constitute thirty percent of the

users, where the number of housewives is very small. Users belonging to the age group 19- 35 form the largest group. Most visitors are college students (Parekh and Sawant,2000: 11-12)

In a more recent online article on Bombay's Cybercafes, Amola Talwar Badam points out that "It is estimated that Bombay has 3,000 cyber-cafes, frequented by about 1.5 million users" (<http://www.detnews.com/2004/technology/0401/20/technology-38856.htm>). The BBC News Technology website (27 January 2004) claimed that sixty percent of Internet users in India use cyber-cafes for surfing the web. The BBC correspondent in Mumbai, Zubair Ahmed, reported that experts say the cyber café has contributed to the boom in Internet usage in India, now estimated at four million subscribers and 18 million users (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology /3431645.stm>). About 2000 cyber cafes are playing a key role in making the Internet accessible. An Indian Media Research Bureau study indicates that around two-thirds of the users surf the Net at cybercafes. International Data Corporation (IDC) reports states that around 35 percent of surfers log on to the Net, both at home and cybercafes. (<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/article show/msid-498269,curpg-1.cms>)

Web-development outfits sprouted first in Bangalore and Hyderabad, and soon in other parts of India. Like the rest of the world, the use of the Internet has been growing steadily though not in all sections of the country. The development of the Internet was hindered by many factors: illiteracy, unavailability of telephone lines, poor transport and communications infrastructure and lack of government support. There are no definitive figures about the use of the Internet in India.

By early 2000, India had an estimated three million Internet subscribers and about 15 million users.these numbers are projected to explode to about eight million subscribers or roughly 40 million users by 2001 (Singal and Rogers, 2001: 235).

The Hindu, however, stated that in 2000

The number of Internet connections in the country was approximately two million, led by the state of Maharashtra (of which Mumbai is a part) with 0.619 million, followed by Delhi (0.319 million), Tamil Nadu (0.219 Million), Karnataka, West Bengal and Gujarat”(The Hindu 10-12-2000 Thiruvananthapuram Edition).

According to the October 2000 report of the Indian Credit Rating Association, (ICRA),

In India the level of Internet penetration is still very low. The country has just around 850,000 Internet subscribers and 3.97 million users. (figures as of March 2000). According to ICRA’s projection India would reach an Internet subscriber base of around 8.3 million users by 2005. ICRA expects the total number of Internet users is to go up to 21.52 million. (<http://www.icraindia.com/biz-arch/9oct2000internet.htm>)

In 2004, the software and service industries account for 16 percent of the country’s overall exports, with an employment of 500,000 professionals and \$1.5 billion in investment. The most significant growth between 1999 and 2002, according to the National Readership Survey, was seen in the growth of the Internet, which leapt ahead of all other media. According to the NRS survey, there were, in 1999, 1.4 million individuals using the Internet, in 2000, there were 1.96 millions, in 2001, 4.11 million individuals and in 2002, the numbers jumped to 6.02 million individuals, proving that the Internet is the fastest growing medium in the country (NRS:2002).

Another interesting item of information provided by the National Readership Survey was how all media usage had dropped, except for the Internet, between 1999 to 2002. Looking at the uses of all mass media, an average 120 minutes-a-day time slot in 1999 versus a 112 minutes-a-day time slot in 2002, showed that about 85 minutes were spent

watching TV in '99 against 82 minutes in '02; 20 minutes in reading newspapers in '99 against 18 in '02; 15 minutes was spent in listening to the radio in '99 against 12 in '02 and 0.3 minutes in using the Internet in '99 against 1 minute in '02. While the overall time spent on other media declined, time spent on the Internet appeared to have increased (NRS 2002). In urban India Internet penetration is estimated to be at 3.6 percent and .9 percent in rural areas (NRS 2003).

3.1.5. India's digital divide

“While few developing countries have benefited more than India from the IT revolution, no country has a wider digital divide”, says Ela Dutt in a country report by the World Economic Forum Steering Committee on Education, a part of the Global Digital Divide Initiative for 2002 (<http://www.apnic.net/mailling-lists/s-asia-it/archive/2002/02/msg00000.html>). Although there has been a significant growth in the use of the Internet in India, it has widened the existing gap between the so called information rich and the information poor. Technology and Science MSNBC News reported:

The gap between digital haves and have-nots is especially wide in India, where a national survey last year revealed that fewer than 1 percent of adults had used the Internet in the preceding three months. (<http://www.msnbc.com/news/979311.asp>)

The users in India tend to be highly educated and of higher socio-economic status, urban rather than rural. Singal and Rogers, studying India's computer and Internet revolution point out that the

close relationship between socio-economic status and computer adoption widens the information gap between the information-rich and the information poor, at least in the initial stages of computer diffusion in a nation like India. (Singhal and Rogers 2001:221).

Singhal also points out that in the Indian work place, paradoxically, computers and the use of the Internet have increased unemployment and deskilled workers, and, at the same time, created greater opportunities for those who are computer literate (2001). While the Internet is becoming increasingly popular, nevertheless, an old telecommunications infrastructure connecting populated areas, combined with high phone line connection costs, has stunted the growth of the Internet in India.

Barely five percent of India's 100,000 secondary schools have computers and, very few public schools currently have access to computers (<http://www.apnic.net/mailling-lists/s-asia-it/archive/2002/02/msg00000.html>).

The digital divide in India has been further enhanced by the gender divide: 79 percent of software professionals were men, whereas 21 percent were women. However, this ratio is likely to be 65:35 (male: female) by the year 2005 (NASSCOM Manpower Resource Survey 2001-2). For the present, the Internet appears to be favouring the young rather than the elderly. The overall median age of software professionals was about 25.6 years (NASSCOM). A national survey revealed that less than 1 percent of adults had used the Internet.

A new approach seeks to bridge this digital divide with a national network of owner-operated computer centers with Internet access. Sashank Garg believes

The best way to bridge the digital divide is through access to IT services for an effective, transparent governance, and in education. The Indian IT industry must recognize that it ignores the local market at its own peril. We have no business to pretend that we are an IT superpower if we are unable to create our own appropriate solutions for our needs (Agarwal and Tiwari, 2002:67).

Another source of hope for the narrowing of the digital divide is a new thrust by entrepreneurs and some business houses to pioneer the use of the Internet in the villages for adult literacy, the spreading of information for improvement in agriculture, small scale village industries and telemedicine. Several local grassroots initiatives by NGOs have furthered the spread of technology into rural India, and the Indian private sector has also become involved.

Towards this end, efforts were made to create products that could be deployed throughout India. Entrepreneurs developed wireless technology to set up Internet kiosks in every village, providing rural users with a simultaneous telephone and Internet connection at low cost. These developers have also coordinated the provision of relevant Internet content, consisting of e-governance applications, rural programmes and agricultural services to the farmer. Jhunjhunwala feels

An Internet kiosk in the village would be a first step towards empowering rural people. Once that happens, one would see multiple connections in the villages...Our next generation must be able to use this resource as they would use pen, paper and books. Only then India would be in a position to effectively utilize its large human resource base (Agarwal and Tiwari, 2002:50).

3.1.6 Internet and Religion in India

India for centuries has a religious ethos that permeates the country, which has been the cradle of many of the world's ancient religions. In his foreword to *Religious Demography of India*, the former Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, stressed the role of religion in India.

..for more than a millennium now, India has been host to some of the greatest, most vigorous and most expansive religions of the world. This circumstance has endowed India with rich diversity; but it has also given rise to some most acute strategic, political and administrative problems that the Indian nation has had to face in the past and continues to face till today (Joshi, Srinivas and Bajaj, 2003:xv-xvi).

India is the birthplace of some religions, which even exist today in the world. The most dominant religion in India today is Hinduism and 82 percent of Indians are Hindus. Today only about 0.40 percent of Indians are Jains and about 0.76 percent are Buddhist. Sikhism, which started in Punjab in the sixteenth century, has spread throughout India and the world since the mid-nineteenth century. With nearly 16.3 million adherents, Sikhs represent 1.94 percent of India's population (<http://www.indianmirror.com/religions/religion.html>)

Along with the religions that developed in India, there are followers of non- Indian religions. The largest non-Indian religion is Islam, which first came to India in the eight century. Muslims are about 12 percent of India's population, about the fourth largest Muslim population in the world. (http://www.Indianchild.com/india_religion.htm). There are Zoroastrians who even though they make up less than 0.01 percent of India's population, are known around India. There are also a few thousand Jews in India. (<http://www.indianmirror.com/religions/religion.html>).

Christians, represented by a variety of denominations, trace their history in India back to the time of the apostles. The apostles were accredited with the spreading of Christianity in the East and according to ancient traditions, St. Thomas came to Persia, St. Matthew to Ethiopia and St. Bartholomew to India.

It is probable that the apostle came to Kalyana – a port north of Bombay, well known and frequented in those times, because he had heard of the existence of a Jewish colony there (Beni Israel) just as St. Thomas may have gone to the Malabar coast to give the news of the Messiah to the Jewish settlers of the dispersion.” (Soares, 1964:3).

With the coming of St. Thomas from Parthia (Persia) to India, the Syrian influence was felt among the Christians in south India, who easily adopted the religious doctrine and ceremonies and came to be known as Syrian Christians. Tradition has it that St. Thomas was ultimately martyred at St. Thomas Mount, Mylapore, Madras in 72.A.D. (Soares,1964: 1-9). The presence of believers even today who claim to be ‘Thomas Christians’ attests to the fact that Christianity had Eastern roots in India from ancient times. Westernized Christianity came into India with the coming of later missionaries from Europe, most notably through Francis Xavier and the Portuguese missionaries, who came with their country’s traders in 1442. Christians are counted at 2.34 percent, of whom Catholics are about 14.9 million members, about 1.5 percent of India's population (Catholic Directory of India 1998) (Appendix XIV).

Religion is no stranger to the Indian audio-visual media. A large section of the Indian population is constantly exposed to religious depictions on television. Religion on TV is accepted as a natural part of the programming. When the Internet came along, it was soon used to express religious thoughts and sentiments. An added attraction of the Internet is its interactive nature, which offers the religious person the possibility, not merely to be a passive spectator, but also to change, modify and create one’s own religious expression. Religious rituals and temples have always been part of the Indian ethos and so it would seem natural that when the Internet began to be used, religion

became part of the unfolding Internet scenario. Sachin Kalra, comments: “Hundreds of sites have mushroomed -from general information of the local mandir [temple] to guided tours of the same; from excerpts of the Vedas to online pujas.” He gives a sampling of the cybershrines with what each of them has to offer:

www.siddhivinayak.org is the Website of the Siddhivinayak temple at Prabhadevi, Mumbai. Besides general information about the temple, you can book a puja,... give donations, glean information about the temple, puja and festival timings and schedules (Times Computing, 23 August 2000).

As Internet users grow more and more versatile in designing and uploading their Websites, it is natural that religious websites began to grow. The Indian search engine ‘Khoj.com’ in one of its webpage ‘Samachar’(News) has a special category of ‘Religion’ (<http://www.samachar.com/religion/>) among the main categories and offers 53 links to almost all the religions of India, with the highest number of links (60) to Hindu deities, temples, festivals, and rituals. The site (<http://www.prarthana.com>) named after the Sanskrit word for worship – offers to conduct prayer rituals (for a fee) at some of the most sacred temples across India. With religion going high-tech, entrepreneurs are looking to cash in. The Indian software industry employs about 522,000 people, many of them pious Hindus. Some are driven to set up online puja services as much by religious faith as by entrepreneurial itch. Many of India’s holy sites and holy people are becoming Net savvy.

Internet users have been encouraged to utilize cyberspace for religious purposes. *Bombay Times*, of the *Times of India* advertising onlinedarshan.com, a space provider, invites readers to enter the divine world:

Divinity in cyberspace... Listen to the wisdom of the Bhagwad Gita online, explained shloka by shloka. Browse through the Ramayana. Reach any temple in India. Now your visit to Mathura, Vrindavan, Shri Balaji, Vaishno Devi or the Golden Temple is only a click away. Join us for the cyber Aarti with the mouse in its new avataar. In today's cyber sansaar, onlinedarshan.com is all you could have prayed for!" (Bombay Times, Times of India:19-4-2000)

Religion, which was previously associated with the sanctuary of the temple and in the privacy of one's home, has now moved on to the net. Hindu religious sites have sprouted up not only in India but are flourishing abroad as well. Gauntlett in 'Web Studies', points out to the presence of Hindu sites outside India.

Maintained by the monks of Saiva Siddhanta Theological Seminary at Kawai's Hindu Monastery on the island of Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands, the website is an online Hindu centre and contains information about Hindu texts, the basics of the philosophy and a list of Hindu resources online at www.hindu.org (2000:183)

Gauntlett further comments on an interesting feature by which online versions attempt to create the experience of visiting a temple:

For instance a click on www.vaishnodevi.com/darshan.htm allows one to access a close up image of one of the inner precincts of one of the most popular shrines in North India. To complete the experience, one can chant the online hymns and listen to the bhajans in streaming RealAudio format (2000: 183).

Sachin Kalra in his report on online puja and facts of worship wonders whether there is a bright future for religion on the net:

Religion has found a new messiah – the Internet, the new age propagator of religion. Only this time it's not preaching a new religion. Apart from Hinduism, the Internet ensures that people stay in touch with local religion from any corner of the globe. How much effect this will have on religion is anybody's guess." (Times Computing: 23-8-2000)

3.1.7 The Internet for religio-political propaganda

A subtle but growing trend in using the Internet for religion is its utilization for religious-political propaganda by communal political parties in India. Realizing the potential of the Web for disseminating information, many political parties have utilized the Internet under the guise of promoting their own brand of religion. The organization that has used the Internet to its maximum political advantage, under the guise of religion, is the *Vishva Hindu Parishad*, VHP (The World Hindu Council). The VHP, a cultural organization with links to a nationalist political party, proposed *Hindutva*, as a new brand of Hinduism. More than any other organised religion in India, Hindu sites are growing and are uploaded not only from India but from Hindu organizations elsewhere, particularly in the US. Although the subjects on Hindutva Web sites vary considerably, the Webmasters and their associates are nevertheless united in their resolve to offer radically altered accounts of even the most common facts of Indian history. Writing in *The History of Histories*, Vinay Lal points out that

Hinduism is a de-centred and deregulated faith, and in this it appears akin to cyberspace.... Hinduism and the Internet, one might conclude, were happily made for each other; even the millions of Web sites evoke the '330 million gods and goddesses' of Hinduism (Lal, 2003:249-250).

Lal further points out how the growing following of Hindutva, not just in India but also abroad, has largely contributed to its success in using the Internet to propagate its version of Hinduism today:

Among the most remarkable and most comprehensive of the sites are those created by the VHP and students who have constituted themselves into the Global Hindu Electronic Network (GHEN). Links take the surfer to such sites as hindunet, the

Hindu Vivek Kendra, and the various articles culled from the archives of *Hinduism Today*..... GHEN is sponsored by the Hindu Students Council, and the astuteness of its creators, no less than their zeal and ardour, can be gauged by the fact that it had developed into the most comprehensive site on Hindutva philosophy and aggressive Hindu nationalism at least eight years ago, when such work in cyberspace was in its infancy (Lal, 2003:252-253).

Conclusion

From what has been observed in the last decade, it is evident that India has been moving quickly from an agricultural nation to one that is gearing up to be an information technology economy. India is building an economy where knowledge, not machines, are the chief resource, and where knowledge workers will gradually make up an ever bigger part of the work force. Since the majority of Indians live in villages, the movement to harness the resources and potential of the Internet for rural use, could be a trend that might prove to be a boon for India in terms of innovation, increasing productivity and gradually bridging the digital divide. It is also evident that while a large percentage of the population of India does not have access to the Internet, this is bound to change in the years to come.

With their expertise at using the Internet for a variety of purposes and with religious ethos being part of the national psyche, Indians have also shown an aptitude for using the Internet for religious purposes. Many have integrated their religious practices with their uses of the Internet, and religious fanatics have utilized the Internet for political gain in the name of religion. In this context the study that is being undertaken in Mumbai will be able to establish whether the members of the Catholic Church, in Mumbai, utilize the Internet for religious purposes, and to what extent the use of the Internet has been perceived to have had an influence on the practice of the Catholic faith, or will have impact in the future.

3.1.8. Reasons for the location: Archdiocese of Mumbai, India

The Archdiocese of Mumbai was chosen because among the 143 Catholic dioceses in India, it is one of the largest, oldest and well-established Catholic Archdioceses. Founded in 1886, it has a Catholic population of around 503,714, in 116 parishes, in a population of 19,249,303 (Census of India, 2001). Besides playing a leading role in the history of the Catholic Church in India, the city of Mumbai is considered the business capital of the country. Looking at the Internet scenario, though Bangalore claims to be the ‘Silicon Valley’ of India, and Secundrabad has the largest number of software professionals, Mumbai has the highest density of computer users.

The Archdiocese has a well-formed laity that has increasingly participated in the life of the Catholic Church and is set to play a greater role in the future. Among them are some of the best media professionals in India. The first Archdiocesan Synod in 2001 stated that information technology should be used for its mission.

Because of the fairly large size of the Catholic population, a laity that increasingly uses computer mediated communications, a diocesan policy that desires to utilize the new media for religious purposes, and the growing use of the Internet in the city of Mumbai, I felt it appropriate to locate this study in this Archdiocese and to obtain a manageable body of representative data from which I could draw inferences about the possible religious uses of the Internet.

Part II. Research Methodology –Focus groups

Introduction

Prior to using focus groups, an attempt was made to establish whether the Internet was being used by the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Mumbai through two questionnaires circulated among various Catholic groups. The first questionnaire (Appendix I) was sent out by e-mail to a personal list of Internet users and it was aimed mainly at finding out about their Internet usage. The response was not very favourable. The second attempt was a questionnaire (Appendix II) drawn up to specifically find out whether the net was being used for religious purposes. About two thousand forms were distributed through the post, by hand and by e-mail and only 215 respondents from Mumbai filled them in.

However, from the responses received, it was observed that many of the respondents did not indicate whether or not they were actually using the Internet for religious purposes. They merely stated that the Internet could be used, or should be used, or must be used for religious purposes, by both individuals and the religious authorities. Hence, it was not possible to establish whether people were using the internet for religious purposes, or to what extent the net was being used by Catholics in a given diocese. It was, therefore decided that focus groups would be conducted to establish the use or non-use of the Internet for religious purposes.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Aim and Objective:

Edward Fern, in *Advanced Focus Group Research*, mentions that the exploratory purposes of focus groups include

creating new ideas; collecting unique thoughts; identifying needs, expectations and issues; discovery of new uses for existing products or discovering new products; and explaining puzzling results from quantitative research(2001:5).

Kruger and Casey spell out the purpose for which focus groups are used in applied research.

The goal of these focus groups is to learn how a target audience sees, understands, and values a particular topic and to learn the language used to talk about the topic. How do they think about it? How do they feel about it? How do they talk about it? What do they like about it? What do they dislike about it? What would get them to use the service or product or start or stop a behaviour? What keeps them from doing it, using it, or buying it? (2000:15)

Keeping in mind the goals of focus groups, as spelled out by Fern, Kruger and Casey, the primary purpose of using focus groups in the Archdiocese of Mumbai was to explore the perceptions of the members of the various focus groups about their ideas, feelings, hopes and fears about using, or not using, the Internet for religious purposes. The focus group would hopefully provide participants with the opportunity to share their individual opinions, which they might not be able to express when filling out a questionnaire. While the focus group could provide some broad trends about Internet use for religion, it would also provide nuances and insights into how respondents feel about this issue.

Besides these perceptions of how they view Internet use for religion, these focus groups would firstly, establish whether the participants were using the Internet or not. Secondly, they would help to discover the type of participants that were using the net, and why the net was being used and to what purpose. Thirdly, the focus groups would also be used to identify the various uses of the net, both in terms of non-religious and religious purposes and also people's perceptions of net users and their usage of the net. Lastly, in the event of non usage of the Internet for religious purposes, the focus groups would help to uncover the reasons why the net was not being used for religious purposes in the Archdiocese of Mumbai and further what would motivate people to use the net more for religious purposes.

3.2.2. The composition of the Focus Groups:

In planning the focus groups, it was felt that the groups would be composed primarily of net users who would be fairly representative of the Catholics of Mumbai in terms of age, sex, and net usage. There would thus be groups organized on the basis of age: young and old, groups divided on the basis of sex: males and females. In particular, to discover how the Catholics of Mumbai use the net for religious purposes, groups would be divided on the basis of religious affiliation: laity, clergy and religious. The other factors that would be kept in mind when organizing groups would be the geographical location of the participants, to see that they came from city as well as suburban parishes. All these factors, it was hoped, would give a fairly representative picture of the Archdiocese of Mumbai.

Preparation and Planning for the Focus Groups

Prior to holding the focus group discussions, a questionnaire guide was prepared, keeping in mind the aims and objectives of the focus groups. Ideas and suggestions were studied and incorporated from David Morgan's books, *Planning Focus Groups* (1997), *Focus groups as Advanced Qualitative Research* (1997), and also from India Media Research Bureau International (*IMRB International*), a research consultancy firm from Mumbai. Each focus group discussion was expected to last for about one and a half hours, and each focus group would have between six and eight, with a maximum of ten and a minimum of four, participants.

Accordingly, there would be five or six questions, starting with an introductory question, followed by a general question on the topic of discussion leading to the main question on the uses of the internet for religious purposes. Further exploratory questions would follow, focussing on the topic and its implications and, finally, a wrap up question to round off the discussion. Each participant would have about ten minutes' time spread out during the discussion for their individual contribution. A focus group guide (Appendix III) was designed and adopted for the various focus group discussions held during the fieldwork conducted in Bombay. This guide was adopted and modified dependant on the type of the group and the quality of the responses received.

3.2.3. Process of selection and composition of participants

For most groups, a larger sample than required were contacted and informed about the proposed focus group venue, date and timings, as some were likely to drop out at the last moment. Participants were informed by phone, email, or through group coordinators, or personal contacts wherever possible. Each set of focus group participants had some variable e.g., age, sex, religious grouping, geographical location, as part of the group composition, so as to see if this variable affected the responses of the group.

Recruitment:

For some groups, participants were recruited directly by contacting those interested and ready to participate in the group discussions. Firstly, the names of persons contacted were taken either from the Archdiocesan Directory of Mumbai, or through local parish contacts suggested by priests and lay coordinators, or from a personal list of local contacts gathered over the years. Secondly, potential participants, like the two adult groups of men and women, were also drawn up by announcements made to parish congregations during the Sunday services. It is possible that, in calling for participants for the focus groups by means of the announcement at the Sunday church service, those volunteering would be people with a special interest in the topic. However, non-users who wished to share their opinions were also invited to participate. In some other cases, the participants were recruited indirectly through those responsible for existing groups. In the case of the youth groups, the respective youth group directors were told of the

purpose of the focus group and the requirement for six to eight participants for each group. The directors were asked to recruit members of their youth groups to participate in the discussion.

The same method was followed in selecting the group of seminarians who were to participate in their own focus group. The priest in charge was informed of purpose of the group discussion and he, in turn, asked the class representative to inform and invite those seminarians who were ready to participate in the focus group discussion. The fourth group, whose participants were recruited by the coordinator, were members of an existing list-serve group. Members were informed by the list-serve group coordinator of the date and venue, but as the number who actually turned up were very few, the moderator contacted a few more members from the parish on the spot. As a consequence, we had a mix of male and female, young and old, married and single experienced users of the net, as well as novices and non-users as participants, in this group.

The fifth group, not directly selected, was a group of Christians belonging to an Evangelical group. These participants were contacted by one of their Church members, who was informed of purpose of the focus group, and these volunteered to come to the focus group discussion. The purpose of recruiting these members of a Christian, rather than strictly Catholic, group was to explore whether a Christian group of another persuasion, differed significantly in their perceptions from their Catholic counterparts.

Planning and Follow up

The preparation of the focus group guide questionnaire, the arrangements of the respective venues and the first contacts were undertaken in the month of December 2002, and the focus group discussions and follow up were conducted during the months of January to March 2003, in the Archdiocese of Mumbai. The services of an assistant were used in the setting up of the local venues and the logistics of the room, as well as for the recording of the proceedings of each focus group. Upon conducting four focus groups, and after discussion with an IMRB International consultant, a questionnaire (Appendix IV) was prepared from the collated responses of the focus groups in order to test the findings with the rest of the focus groups and with a wider sample.

3.2.4. The profile of the focus groups

Focus Group 1. Religious Sisters – Daughters of St. Paul, Bandra

This first focus group, planned as a pilot test case, was composed of nine religious sisters from the congregation of the Daughters of St. Paul, Bandra, and from other congregations. The average age was 40 years. The discussion about their media habits revealed that all participants mostly read newspapers, magazines and books and watched television. Most used the computer, mainly for work, and used e-mail for sharing information and for keeping in touch. About half the group surfed the net sporadically for information and personal needs. Learning from this pilot test case, adjustments were made to the focus group guide and the practicalities of running the focus groups.

Focus Group 2. Mixed Group – St. Joseph’s Parish, Vikhroli

The purpose of organising this focus group was to bring together members of a list-serve group from St. Joseph’s Parish, Vikhroli, one of the suburbs of Mumbai. These members were middle-class parishioners, residing in this growing parish. The members were initially contacted by the moderator of the Vikhroli list-serve group and expressed willingness to participate in the discussion. Unfortunately, on the actual day most of the list-serve member participants did not turn up and so the local organizer contacted other members of the Vikhroli parish, who were recruited at short notice for the focus group discussion. The result was that we had a mixed group comprising of eight participants, three females and five males, most were married and in the 30-plus age group, however, there was one college-going young female. All participants used television on a regular basis for news and entertainment. The other media used were newspapers, and most of the group also used radio for music and entertainment. All were regular users of e-mail for work and for keeping in touch. Three participants were computer professionals, while three others surfed the net only for work purposes. One person hardly used the net.

Focus Group 3. Junior Clergy Group – St. Pius College, Goregaon

The purpose of organizing the third group was to get together a group of priests who were net users. It was decided to contact all those who had been ordained between six and ten years ago, as this would provide a sample of junior clergy familiar with the net. About fifteen priests were contacted and, of the seven who participated, two were teaching in the seminary, one worked in Archbishop’s House as a secretary, and four

were involved in parish work. The average age of the seven participants was 30. All read the daily newspapers and watched television, and four listened to the radio for music and entertainment. The computer and Internet were used for work purposes, and for obtaining materials needed for their work. E-mails were used regularly to keep in touch with others. All were familiar with the net: some were heavy users, others sporadic, and one was a web designer.

Focus Group 4. Adult Males -St. Andrews Parish, Bandra

This Focus Group was composed of male adults from some of the parishes of Bandra. The participants of the parishes of Bandra were chosen because Bandra is fairly representative of Mumbai. The participants belonged to the thirty-plus age group and were fairly active in their respective parishes. The means used to contact them were e-mails, telephone calls and an open invitation, issued during Sunday Church services. There were many who responded to the invitation and who were subsequently contacted by email and/or telephone calls. Seven individuals turned up for the group discussion, of whom three were in the middle-age group and four were seniors. All the participants read newspapers, watched television for news and relaxation and one used radio for music and relaxation. All were familiar with computers and used them mainly for work. Most used e-mail for keeping in touch with relatives and friends and three were regular surfers of the net. Three of the participants were working in the computer industry as consultants, and four were light users of the Internet.

Focus Group 5. Adult Females -St. Andrews Parish Bandra

This focus group was composed of women from the different parishes of Bandra. Some of the participants were informed of the focus group by e-mail and expressed their wish to participate. Others heard of the focus group through the invitation issued in two parishes at Sunday morning Church services. The six participants belonged to the middle-age group, most were married, working women, and two had just retired. All participants watched television regularly, read the newspapers and almost all read magazines for information and relaxation. Only two mentioned that they used the radio for relaxation. One noticeable difference from the men's group of similar age was that the women used the Internet far less than the corresponding male group. Most had used e-mail, mainly for chatting and keeping in touch with friends and family and to send greeting cards. Most were not familiar with surfing the Internet, but used it for e-mail, and only a couple surfed the net regularly. However, one younger participant was a regular user working in web-designing.

Focus Group 6. Female Youth Group -Infant Jesus Parish, Dombivli

To obtain a different sample of participants from a younger age group, youth groups were contacted through their youth directors. Rather than choose a city sample, the female youth group was chosen from a distant suburb, and a relatively newly-founded parish. There were eight participants in the group; four were attending college and the other four were young, working adults. The group were aged between 18 and 25 years of

age, and most came from the lower-income group. All participants watched television and the next most popular medium was the Internet. Newspapers and magazines were read, and two of the youth used radio regularly for music and relaxation. All were computer-literate and used the net for chatting, keeping in touch with friends, for study and work. All were Internet savvy, though most did not have computers at home and used these either at their college, cyber cafes, or at work.

Focus Group 7. Male Youth Group -St. John the Baptist Parish, Thane

These participants were similar to those of the female youth group in so far as they were recruited by the director of the local parish youth group. The parish from which this male youth group originated is one of the oldest parishes in the suburbs and has a traditional, well-established congregation, not too actively involved in parish activities, which are generally undertaken by senior parishioners. The eight participants were mostly college students; three were also working. The group was between 18 and 25 years of age, and most came from the lower-income group. All watched television, and half the group also used radio as their source of relaxation and entertainment. Half read the newspapers regularly, and most mentioned the Internet as a source of entertainment. All were computer savvy and used the net, mostly at college, in the cyber cafes, or at work, as not many of them had a computer at home. They used the net for study, information, and for keeping in touch with friends.

Focus Group 8. Seminary Theology Students -St. Pius College, Goregaon

The participants in this focus group were recruited through the senior students' representative of the Seminary. Eight students participated in the discussion; all of them were in their early or late twenties. The seminarians used the newspapers, television and radio for news, information and relaxation. Their hobbies are listening to music, reading and surfing the Internet. They were very open to using the Internet regularly for their personal work, as well as for class assignments and religious studies. They used e-mail to keep in touch with family and friends and to share information.

Focus Group 9. Basel Mission Church, Group –Andheri

The last focus group comprised of members of Basel Mission Church, a Protestant church in Andheri, brought together by a member of the church. Only four members of those invited turned up for the meeting; two were male and two female. Three of the participants were working, and one was studying on a student exchange programme. All four participants watched television and read the newspapers regularly. All were familiar with the net. They used e-mail for keeping in touch with friends and family and for sharing information. The participants surfed the Internet regularly for personal needs.

3.2.5 Variables in the Focus Group and Sample Representation

These nine focus groups could be said to be fairly representative of diverse sections of mostly the Catholic Church of Mumbai. The groups took into account the age; there were two groups of young male and female adults, as well as two groups of senior male and female adults. The groups were also varied from the point of view of their location, with a couple of groups in the city and a couple of groups in the distant suburbs of the city. The parishes chosen also varied between traditional well-established parishes and newly-founded parishes. While the composition of the group had participants who were familiar with the net, there was a fair mixture of those who used only emails, and those who surfed the net. Similarly, while there were some in every group who were very much involved in parish activities, there were others who were involved in web-designing and Internet activity.

Another variable borne in mind in organizing the focus groups, was the distinction between clergy and laity and hence there were groups with only lay people, and others with only clergy or religious. This variable was introduced to study and see if the clergy used the Internet more or less than the laity, and in what ways their use, or lack of use, of the net for religious purposes differed from the laity.

Part III Findings of the Focus groups

Introduction

In this section, the findings of the research conducted through the nine focus groups are being reported to lay down the broad parameters of the research, from which conclusions will be drawn out later. In the nine focus groups conducted in the Archdiocese of Mumbai an attempt was made to let all the participants express their ideas, opinions and experiences with regard to how they perceived and used the Internet. Beginning with sharing their media habits and how they utilize the various media in their daily life, the discussion gradually focused on their Internet usage and practice.

The reporting is done in such a manner that it is possible to first visualize the broad trends of generic Internet usage, followed by religious use of the Internet. This is followed up by the study of the particular perceptions of the participants, which reveals their specific viewpoint, opinion and perspective about why the Internet is being used, or not being used, for religious purposes by Catholics in Mumbai. The subsequent section will deal with particular issues connected to the use, or non-use, of the Internet for religious purposes, which the participants perceive as significantly influencing net usage for religion. The last section will report on the participants' perception of people's openness to the Internet, the possible influence that the use of the net would have on religion, and what strategies should be used to make the Internet better used for religious purposes in Mumbai.

In reporting the findings an attempt is made to keep a balance between summarizing opinions and quotation of participants. As Morgan points out

the actual report requires a balance between direct quotations of the participants and the summarization of their discussions. Too much summarization is not only dry but also deprives the reader of even indirect contact with participants that their verbatim statements provide (1997: 64).

From the vast amount of data that was transcribed from the recordings of the discussions of the focus groups, common opinions, general trends, salient and significant ideas, as well as subtle nuances and distinct, and sometimes contradictory, individual points of view expressing different shades of opinions and ideas are presented below, so that one gets a comprehensive picture of the variety of perceptions on the various topics that were discussed in the focus groups.

3.3. Net Usage

3.3.1 General uses of the Internet

This section establishes the fact that Catholics in Mumbai are using the Internet for a variety of generic purposes. From the discussions held with the various focus groups, it would appear that computer-mediated communication, whether by e-mail or Internet, is growing in popularity among all sections of people. For some, it is becoming part of their life, which appears to be becoming web-centred. It is used mostly in work-related situations and environments. E-mails and the Internet are being used for multiple purposes: for keeping in touch with friends, family, and work colleagues; for reaching

out and maintaining relationships, for seeking and sharing work/study related information; for purposes of correspondence, business and entertainment. The young and the old, the clergy and the laity in Mumbai, appear to be at home using the Internet, though for different purposes. The responses, presented below, reveal the variety of Internet usage.

An adult male member of the Bandra parishes group mentioned how the computer has become central to his entire day:

For me, the computer is really the central item, because firstly it is my profession, secondly it is also a hobby of mine and thirdly, entertainment. So e-mails, for communications with my friends, with clients, for keeping my work up to date; and surfing the net for a wide range of things: for information, for pleasure for every thing. So I can say I guess I use the computer, almost all my day is spent using the computer.

A college-going, male youth from St. John Baptist parish, Thane, felt that his life has become web-centred, and is a means of socializing as well as studying:

I use it for everything, for my life is quite web-centred. All our project reports and events in college, everything is done through e-mails. Almost all my class logs on in the night, we are online and we are chatting with each other. So quite everything, from entertainment to serious stuff, everything is done on the net. Everyone logs on at the same time and chats.

Talking of his use of the Internet, a layman from the St. Joseph parish, Vikhroli shared how the Internet has become part of his daily routine.

I use it to reach out to the people, my own relatives. As far as work is concerned, no question of working in the office, because my office and my home is the same, so I do surf at any time of the 24 hrs. For the rest of the day, rest of time of course it is used by the rest of the family for games and all.

A young seminarian, from St. Pius College, Goregaon, studying for the priesthood, felt that his use of the Internet differed from how young people used the Internet today:

Basically, I use the Internet for emails to keep in contact with people. And for the youth, most of the younger folks use it for leisure. On the whole, it would be for entertainment in general and leisure. The higher age-group would use it for work-related information. They use it for keeping in touch, entertainment and work info.

A retired woman from the Bandra parishes, shared how she generally used e-mail:

Basically, the net is for keeping in touch, sending cards, sending letters, music and at all kinds of things. I do surf, sometimes for information on cooking, it has some very good recipes, housekeeping, with a lot of good hints on things like that, or anything else that you get some information that would help, may be, from gardening to pets.

A female youth member of the Infant Jesus parish, Dombivili, saw the Internet differently from how the women group members perceived it, using the net for multi tasking:

It's got a lot of advantages, I can meet friends online whom otherwise I might not be able to meet, I can also side by side do my work, so simultaneously I will be doing two jobs, so internet would be my second job.

Another female working youth from the same Infant Jesus parish, Dombivli pointed out how she uses the Internet:

Internet does help if I want to collect a lot of other information and I need it fast. So at that point of time, the Internet does come and help, and also, I have to use the Internet a lot for my job because we have an intranet for our office. So I have to work on the intranet. From the work point of view, of course Internet would be first.

Referring to his particular use of the Internet, a junior member of the clergy, informed the priest focus group how he uses the net for his official, as well as personal work:

I do a lot of correspondence officially, as well as my own personal work. Initially, I used to do a lot of chatting and I realized that it was becoming more of a time waste, so then, whenever I came online, I used to use it. I use it for keying in information, sermons, also downloading, I would say, artwork for cards and the like.

3.3.2 Perceptions of using the Net for religious purposes

The term 'religious use', or using the net for 'religious purposes', was deliberately not defined so as to see how participants perceived religious usage of the Internet. There appeared to be three ways of looking at religious use of the Internet that emerged from the participants understanding of the term. Firstly, religious use was perceived in e-mails and websites, whose content dealt with God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Church, faith, religion, doctrine, and such allied topics. In other words, religious use was equated with subject matter dealing with religious topics. Secondly, participants felt that if the purpose of using the net was for promoting and propagating the faith, deepening one's understanding of one's faith, expressing the faith, and recreating faith rituals and practices, then the use could be considered religious. Thirdly, many of the participants took for granted that ownership of a website by a religious organization or institution would make their use of the Internet religious. Most members, therefore, perceived the Vatican site, or their diocesan or parish web pages, as religious websites.

Members of the various focus groups shared how they personally used the Internet for religious purposes. A few participants gave examples of what they considered religious websites to illustrate their point. In general, the most significant religious use of the Internet was for obtaining/sharing religious news and information, for passing on spiritual messages, for studying spiritual teachings, and for sharing faith with individuals and members of the community. Some others perceived using the Internet for obtaining religious aids for study, preaching and teaching religion, as religious usage of the

Internet. Most did not perceive the Internet as a substitute for religious practices, or as a new form of religious experience.

A professional, computer-savvy layman also from St. Joseph's parish, Vikhroli shared what he perceived as his own religious use of the Internet:

I'm using it, basically, for browsing our Archdiocese's sites. Also, I have a spiritual mailing list of 25 to 30 people.. I also use it to browse our Catholic magazines, to get some information regarding the Mass, the Bible Online, as well as the readings of the day. I think we can have discussions regarding, like the Constitution of the church.

A senior member of the men's group from a parish in Bandra talked of how he uses the net for a religious purpose:

I go to this site, it's known as 'Beliefnet', and every day you get some reflection from the bible, normally I don't go through it everyday but it keeps on coming faithfully. and people send e-mail things like 'Interview with God'.... The wordings are so thought provoking and worth reflecting.

A young mother, from the Bandra parishes, informed the group about how she uses the Internet to obtain religious information for her faith ministry:

I do use it to get material, since I am helping out with the 'Kids-for-Christ' Bible study. I always search for some kind of a Bible story, a moral story, a game, a craft, activity. I use Christian crafter.com to get stories for kids, sermons for kids, and things like that. I also use it since we are in 'Couples for Christ,' I try to use the Internet for information that I can put into the talks.

A young woman talked of how she surfs the Internet for her personal spiritual needs:

I'm working as a web developer so I surf both for work as well as a hobby. Ya, for religious purposes also, I do research and I get information on the life of saints because I write in our Parish bulletin, I go to all, sort of websites. I go to get information. And also, talking of Jesuit websites, there's this site called Sacred Space which is..., like it's just a meditative site, you go through the whole thing.

A religious sister from the Daughters of St. Paul, Bandra, felt that people are using email and Internet to share religious messages:

I think people are using the Internet very much for religious purposes. It came up strongly after the September 11th, when you constantly got messages saying that this is a prayer, please forward this message; then there are chain prayers that go on, and there are power-point programmes, which is very religious-based and asks you to circulate it if you like it or touches you.

Another religious sister from the same congregation felt that priests and religious use the Internet for religious purposes, but was unsure of the laity:

From my experience, quite a lot of sisters and priests are using the Internet for these kind of inspirational purposes, I do not know if lay persons are using it, except now for that Iraq war. I have come across lay people, who I do not think use the Internet for religious purposes, they are more for the fashion world.

A response from a member of the younger clergy, familiar with the Internet, could be said to be typical of the use the younger priests make of the Internet:

I use it for religious news; then also for specific information when I am preparing certain courses; then for information about the Church, I also get these, religious e-mails then I get sermons also. Then also a lot of people send me these inspirational stories, which may not have any religious value in itself, but could be used for giving a religious message.

Another priest, who uses the computer a lot for his pastoral work, shared how he uses the Internet for his ministry:

I use it mostly to get information, things related to theology or inspirational articles and things like that. And I think other people use it often because of the same thing, sort of shop for spiritual, inspirational messages, for power-point presentations. And I think some also use it for counselling through e-mail.

A young priest shared how he uses the Internet to study religious topics that are not usually discussed, or are taboo:

Many times, you can read about issues which they don't deal with, or are not comfortable to talk about, or are even closed to discussion in the Archdioceses of Bombay. These are available on the net, that's the reason why I surf the net. You cannot have a discussion out here on such topics like woman's priesthood. On the net, you can have a discussion with whomsoever you want to discuss.

A female youth surfer from the Infant Jesus parish, Dombivli, though personally she was not using the Internet for religion, felt that others are using the Internet for religion:

I think they are definitely using it for religious purpose, the reason being that if you go onto these chat rooms, especially, you've got these categories, where one category is always there. That is religion. So, I am sure people log onto it. Not that I have been there, but, then, I am sure that there is religion.

An adult male participant from St. Joseph's parish, Vikhroli, familiar with web designing, informed the group how he put up a website to share his personal spiritual experience:

My website was kind of religious, in a way. It was basically my testimony of how God healed my hand. I went for a healing service at Kalyan and the priest announced there on the stage: 'There is a man who broke his right hand in an accident, God is healing him right now.' That instant my hand got healed. Basically, this is what inspired me to put up the website. I put it on the net so that other people would learn, and in a way, have a religious experience. So, in a way I have used it for religious purposes and I think it can be used very well for this.

A young seminarian, from St. Pius College, Goregaon, felt that religion was covertly present on the net and people were accessing these religion sites when they felt the need:

Religion is there, but not in the forefront, rather in the background. People are more caught up in business. But when it comes to a certain situation, or problems, then the search for God surfaces. So the majority of people in today's computer age are moving towards becoming someone. The sites tend to have an influence on them.

A woman religious from the Daughters of St. Paul, saw possibilities for using the net for religion and felt that the Internet was being used for religion:

I am from Bassien. I think very much about religious purposes of the Internet, and people....are making the use of this facility. This is my hearing knowledge, I have not done anything about that. About the lay people I would say they are more interested in the outer world, that is the materialistic world. But I think there are people who make use of it for religion.

Another woman religious, from a congregation in Bandra, felt that the net's religious use could be seen in the inspirational stories that are circulated via the Internet and e-mail:

But one thing that gets circulated among all age groups is inspiring stories. We always see inspiring stories. It is sent to a vast majority of people and youth groups. But to visit a (religious) site, it would come only after the age group of 40 only, I think. I have seen people sending messages but they seem to be middle-aged. Youth would not go to visit a religious site purposely.

3.3.3 Participants question the use of net for religious purposes

There were, however, many who were not aware of any religious usage of the Internet, and some who could not see how the Internet could be used for religious purposes, as well as a few who were opposed to using the Internet for religious purposes. These views were held by members of all the different focus groups, irrespective of their composition. However, it would appear that many young people were strongly traditional in their approach to religion and the Internet. While they were open to use of the net for some religious purposes, they did not want to see the net replacing their worship in the Church and within the parish community.

A male youth from St. John Baptist parish, Thane, was not aware of people using the Internet for religion and questioned whether people were doing so:

From my experience, I have not heard of it. I have never heard about religious web sites. I don't even know if anyone is using it.

A female youth group member from Infant Jesus parish, Dombivli, questioned whether one needed the net for the practice of one's religion:

I think you have to look at how important religion is to a person's life. Ok, you know, may be some people think that religion is coming to church once on Sunday or doing your regular commitments, you know. For me, as a person, I might think I'm doing the optimum and I don't feel the need to go to a religious website and check out what's happening there.

A women Religious from the Daughters of St. Paul, Bandra, confessed that she did not use the net for this purpose because they were not used to it:

I have not done anything religious, as such, because I have to, first of all, get used to the net, besides other reason no time and I have to update myself regarding the net.

A member of the St. John Baptist parish, male youth group from Thane, pointed out the problem with offering traditional religious practices in newer forms:

People feel that we are too traditional because you have religion as an old religion. The church has been developing and improvising on their old procedures, but there are some things that should be kept the way they are, I mean, you cannot necessarily make religion your convenience. Just because your life style becomes busy, if you are trying to bend the religion according to your life style, you might as well leave it.

A female member of the youth focus group at Infant Jesus parish, Dombivli, pointed out that the Internet would depend on whom the clergy wish to reach out to through their evangelizing efforts:

I think it depends on the section of people, say, the clergy would want to focus on. If you are thinking about trying to spread the news to the lower strata of this side, they don't have the resources, so you should not use the net. If you are thinking... 'I have to touch the elite class', then the Internet could be used, because nowadays it's the in-thing to be on the net. So it also depends on the people that you want to target.

3.3.4 Perceptions of why the net is used/not being used for religion

Members were asked why they felt the Internet was not being used to a large extent for religious purposes. Participants perceived a variety of issues relating to the net, people, religion or the church authorities, because of which the Internet was not used in this way. Some participants perceived Internet issues like finance, lack of skill or accessibility to the net, as reasons why the net was not used for religious purposes.

Others felt poor usage resulted from people's lack of awareness of using the net for religion, lack of information about religious use of the net or lack of interest in religious matters themselves, and the traditional habits of Church goers. Still others pointed to the lack of promotion of the religious websites by the Church, and the lack of guidance or direction from priests and the Church. Some faulted the nature of the net, which they believed was not conducive to religious use in so far as the net was distractive, there was no personal touch on it and the abundance of information available on the net could result in confusion in religious matters.

Issues related to net use: Financial considerations/skill/accessibility

A layman from the St. Joseph's Parish, Vikhroli, pointed out that financial viability and lack of information were reasons for poor web usage:

One of the things is, it is quite expensive to have a computer, or even to go to the cyber café. Another thing is that many people are not given access or information about how to begin. Everybody will grumble that nobody does anything good on the net, but very few people will give information. Information, sometimes, is what we lack, the basic information that is required to start off, and, basically, resources.

A priest wondered whether people could afford to pay for internet use in the cyber cafes in order to use the net for religion:

I don't know how many Catholics have computers or access to computers. I think, Catholics, if they have access to computers in the cyber-café, or working in the office, they would use it mostly for correspondence, Emails. I don't know how many Catholics technically do have a computer at home or go to the cyber-cafe to really use information for religious purposes. I am not sure of that.

A layman from the Bandra group wondered whether the net was not being used by the older folks because of poor net skills:

I think it is more than one reason why people don't use the net for religious purposes, one is computer savvy. Second, is more than savvy, it is not being comfortable with a computer. They don't know what they can do with it. Once you understand what a tool can be used for, you immediately think of how you can put it to use. But if you do not know what it can do, then it is going to lie there unused.

A youth from St. John Baptist parish, Thane, felt that lack of accessibility to the net hindered its use for religion:

I think the same point, accessibility. Had people easy access to the net, then probably they might go on different sites and actually know what treasure it holds. Possible that they might go onto religious sites as in the West.

Issues: lack of awareness/information/interest/traditional nature

A woman religious from Bandra proposed lack of awareness and religious interest as the main causes for the poor usage of religious sites:

I also feel that they are not aware and there are so many things that you can do in the little time you may have in front of the computer, even the games are very attractive. Sometimes, when you are working the whole day and have little time, you want to relax with some games and only after that visit religious sites.

A seminarian, from St. Pius College, Goregaon, wondered whether youth were interested in Internet use for religious purposes:

I feel that the first question we should look at is: who are the users of the net? If you see the population in Bombay, the Catholics are middle class and among them it is mostly the youth who are net users. I feel that youth are really not interested in knowing more about faith and about religion, because they are happy with what they have. That, I feel, is one of the reasons youth are not using it.

Issues related to Church Personnel : Promotion/guidance/interest

A lay man from the seniors' group from the Bandra parishes, highlighted the lack of guidance or encouragement for using the Internet:

I think there is bit of unawareness regarding the facilities which are there, and there is no promotion by the religious leaders themselves. I do believe there is no support, there is no encouragement in this way and as this is a new mode of communication, no guidance is easily available for the layman. The religious organizations are slow to adapt to the new technology.

Another reason given by a seminarian, for lack of use of religious websites is that there is no personal touch on the net, which is vital for religion:

When we talk of net there is no personal touch. When there are difficulties and doubts, people would rather, go to some person, in particular a priest, and they like to get an answer rather than to go to the net. Because they know that there is personal communication with that person and, also, when we talk about religion, the whole aspect is not individualistic. Religion gives you more meaning when there is community. I think the net lacks all these things, it lacks the personal touch.

Issues related to nature of Net: Non-conducive to religious use

A male member of the Basel Mission Church, Andheri, felt that the Internet was too distracting to be used for religious purposes:

The internet is very distractive, there are so many things on the net. Why should I go on religious sites when I can go and chat? Why should I go and pray? Why should I not chat? If I start downloading music, then I don't have the financial resources to go on religious sites, especially in the cyber café. You might, given the choice, you might rather download music than go to these religious sites.

A seminarian from St. Pius College, Goregaon, offered a similar reason -lack of clarity, for the poor response to using the Internet for religious purposes.

I think people get emails from different sources regarding religion, there are so many. Sometimes it is not Catholic teachings, so people have a lot of confusion.

They don't know whether it is Catholic teaching, or from different denominations or sects. So those who are using it for religious purposes get confused. The major reason why the large majority is not using it is lack of clarity, lack of information.

3.3.5 Whether Internet use is a threat or an asset to religion

The perception of the participants was that the Internet could be seen both as an asset and a threat to the Church. Some participants saw the net as a threat to the Church's authority, its practice and teachings, and as an option that will further the digital divide. Others saw the use of the Internet as an asset to the Church, in so far as it could boost the Christian community, help to create public opinion through interactivity, enable the church to be more accountable and efficient and help to foster understanding and dialogue in religion. This issue was mainly discussed by the youth focus groups.

A young, male member of the St. John Baptist youth, group suggested the result would depend on how the net was positioned with regard to peoples needs:

My personal point of view is that, if the services offered on the web were made to complement the services that were offered in the church, then it would be a tremendous success. But if people got the idea that they were designed to supplement what is offered in the church, then I think both sides are going to suffer.

A female member of the Infant Jesus parish, Dombivli, youth group, felt that the use of the Internet would not be a challenge to the Church or else the Church itself would not be promoting something that could threaten it:

In a community like ours, if you tend to promote Internet it would not be a threat, it would be just a means of keeping in touch. People still believe that it would be nice to come to Church and meet personally. If they feel the net is very important to them, then they might stop coming to Church and that might become a problem. And if the Church is trying to promote religion, and if they think Internet is that powerful, then how will it be a threat to them?

The net: a threat to religious authority

A member of the St. John Baptist, Thane, male youth group, felt that questioning religion was good, but not for the clergy:

- It will make religion a debatable issue. I think that is a good thing but right now I don't think the clergy is up to it.

A member of the senior woman's group from the Bandra parishes, thought that the Church does see the Internet as a threat today:

I think that the Church hierarchy is beginning to feel the threat, and to think that the Internet will take over in some way. That is why they are trying to bring the laity so much into the picture. Probably they do feel that the Internet is a threat and the church may do better so they are asking the involvement of the laity in each and every thing in the Church today. So they do see it as a threat.

The net: a threat/ asset to religious practices

A member of the clergy focus group felt that using the net for religious purposes, could be a viable alternative where nothing was available:

I think it's both ways, wherein people who do not have access to any group, or are not allowed to be a part of the group physically, then this is the next best thing, At least they have something. But when the option exists of having an actual flesh and blood group, people should make the effort to be present to one another. But there could be a group which, for some reason, could not be able to go anywhere. This virtual option could be pretty useful in a place like Saudi.

A male youth of the St. John Baptist youth group, said that the Internet could be an asset to the Church and also a challenge to it:

You can see it both ways. In one way it can be an asset, you will have people who, out of curiosity, may come and check what this religion is all about, just to clear some of their doubts. On the other hand, you have different sects interpret what's in the Bible in different ways. But if you have a uniform web site, which claims authenticity, then you will not have a problem of people getting the wrong message.

The Net: deepening the digital divide

One layman, from the St. Joseph's parish group, questioned the value of using the Internet, as it does not appear to reach out to the vast multitude but only to a minority of believers:

Now, I have quite a frustration which is that ultimately all this is concentrated to a very small percentage of people. It is mind boggling to believe, and to even imagine, that it can reach the majority. Take the area of Vikhroli, the amount of people who are using the computer, and the Internet, is so minuscule. Out of five thousand people in Vikhroli, I think not more than a 100 are open to this sort of thing. Now we must see; how do we think of ways and means to reach out and increase this percentage?

A layman, from the seniors' group of Bandra parishes, pointed out the small number of users as the reason the Church is not interested in promoting the net:

I am also talking of why the Church feels that it is not a priority. You might say that if you took a survey of Bombay, you would see people who have computers would be only 10%, so the Church is not interested.

Another layman, who was a computer consultant, from the Bandra group, focused on the unavailability of easy net access as one of the reasons for poor usage:

Then again, the problem that comes in is the net-access. Why would the Church put something online to start with? Net access in India is still largely dialup based, and dialup lines are expensive, and that is where the problems come. When I am at home, I am not going to get connected for religion. I use it mainly only for work....So only a certain section of the community would want to go online to use it for religion.

A female youth, from the Dombivli youth group, pointed out the difference between youth who are rich and have net facilities at home, and those who are not rich, who access the net in the cyber-cafes, where it is difficult to surf for religion

If you look at people who stay at Western side, I mean most of my friends who stay down there, have got net at their places, they've got PC's at their place, they've got a modem at their place, and then, you know, they have net at their home. And for

others, we have to depend on work places or actually walk down to a cyber-cafe to have an access to the net. So that makes it difficult to access religious sites.

The net is an asset to Christian community

When queried whether the use of the Internet would enhance or destroy the church, community members were ambivalent and felt that it would depend on the type of use made of religious websites, as well as the purpose for which they were being used. Though they were open to net communities, they felt that this should not be at the expense of the regular, traditional, Christian community.

A layman from St. Joseph's Parish, Vikhroli, suggested that Internet communities were meeting the need of individuals for a sense of belonging.

The possibilities are unlimited, because everyone looks for a sense of belonging, a claim or affection, and wherever they get it they go. Many of the people, who left the church, have left for similar reasons. It is because they got something, they have got some kind of a reward, you can call it. There was a human touch, you might say, that kind of, makes them join a particular group or community. On the net itself, you get many of these communities that have a similar idea or similar line of thinking.

A lay, professional computer specialist from St. Joseph's parish, Vikhroli, proposed that, irrespective of where and how the group is formed, it is part of the church, since people constitute the church:

I do believe that the boundaries that define our understanding of who the Church is, contributes to this question, because the people are the Church. So, wherever the people are, there is the Church. There are the times when we have experienced a lot of things, which, if we had some sort of religious group we could go and seek some solace, that would make a big impact on a person's life. Therefore, we find that people bond together much more online than over here.

Another male member of the St. Joseph parish, Vikhroli, suggested that the possibility of belonging to an online group should be available to those who wanted it:

We have many people on different topics that interact like that, and Yahoo is one website, and you have many people who come in. We go there for spirituality, and for games, and you get a lot of people interacting there. So, if you have something on a website on a Christian theme, you will have many people coming to it.

A lay man from the same Vikhroli parish group, who uses the net extensively, expressed openness and a desire to belong to an online religious group:

I would love to be a part of a group that really analyses things, but, unfortunately, I have not been able to find a group where I fit. On the net there are so many groups, you have to really search till you finally find something you can gel with. If we have something and we know of it, suppose we were to form a group, that will be easy to communicate with, it would help, a forum like that.

A female member of the Infant Jesus Parish youth group, pointed out how the net could be a threat to the Christian community:

If, within the same church, you have an option of meeting every Sunday, but still you would rather communicate through the e-mail, then I think it's a negative aspect of the net, or the facilities that are available. But, if you have a genuine problem of distance and then you are using it, then it's a positive way of using the net. So it depends on these criteria.

The net : an asset for freedom of speech/ interactive communication

A layman from the focus group at St. Joseph's Parish, Vikhroli, proposed that interactivity should be part of a religious website:

So, if you make a site interactive, where things come alive, you know, then it attracts the youth, it attracts people also. Because on the net people come to spend some time, basically. In that time, whatever is interesting, whatever catches the eye, is what they click. Or there are people who come dedicated, who are looking for something. If you have an interactive site, it is very easy to go or download whatever.

A priest working in a suburban parish felt, similarly, that there has to be some means offered to the people to express themselves:

I think it is very important, because a lot of people are disillusioned by the way we run our Church. In the Church, formation is restricted to the sermon and the Sunday school, for instance. Ok, now we have started new things, but still that is not enough. Even if people express themselves, it is enough for them. At least somebody is listening to them. A lot of people would respond to it...

Another priest, who uses the Internet for his ministry, found that some of his parishioners used the net precisely to interact and to voice their opinions about issues of interest:

Very often those who are silent in public have a lot to say. But quite a few very serious questions, questions which show their thinking and sometimes also things that they don't want to tell you on a face to face basis, it's more like confession, some would call it that. They feel certain, a kind of confidence, to talk. That's one area I have found very popular on the net.

A member of the clergy suggested that people want to voice their opinions:

I think of these snap opinion polls, we could do something like that every week, and people would respond to it. You get an opinion, even if it is not the majority. It is an opportunity to be able to voice their opinion. We should try it. I think if you have a questionnaire, they may not have the time, but something like this poll would work.

Another member of the clergy pointed out that the use of the Internet could enhance the role of the laity in the Church by giving them an active role in the church set up:

Another thing is, if it is interactive then the people will have a chance to express what they feel. That would make a lot of people feel that we are a part of this Church. I think that would open up a lot of areas for interaction, people would feel we are part of the Church, something that's missing right now.

One senior member of the woman's group from Bandra did not feel the need for interaction on a religious website:

I, for one, am not comfortable interacting and doing that, typing in responses, it is not my scene, so I don't do it. But I would like to have a choice to go where I wanted in the religious sites.

The net an asset for accountability/efficiency

A layman, working in computer programming, from St. Joseph's Parish, Vikhroli, pointed out how the Internet could make the Church more efficient and streamlined organizationally:

I am thinking of the Church from a point of view of a corporate organization. In a corporate organization, on their website, they have everything that the general public would want to know. So there could be, on the website of the parish, a link where any person who wants to see the financial status, or the amount of donations, could do so. For everything that a parishioner would want to know about what's happening within the Church, he can just go and check out what's happening on the net.

A layman from the Bandra parishes group wanted to see the networking happening in the Church, as it would benefit all those involved and interested in it:

I would like to see this happening because now, in business, where you have networking everybody knows in an instant what is happening in a particular department. I think that networking should come in the Church. So networking is going to be a very useful tool for communications and various organizations in the parish and in the dioceses networking together.

The net, an asset for better understanding of religions

A young female member of the St. Joseph parish, Vikhroli, focus group, shared her experience of using the Internet for religious purposes:

I do not go particularly to any religious site, but I have seen my husband and my friends using it for understanding something religious. I go to the website called Benny Hinn Ministries to send my prayer requests and all. I have also gone to a religious website because one of my friends is a Muslim. I just wanted to know a little about her religion. I think it is very important to have a website with all our religions, spirituality so that people are more and more aware of the things.

A senior member of the adult, male group, from the Bandra parishes, found that people used the Internet to understand their own religion, as well as other religions. He shared his own experience in the matter:

I have come across, in my work place, people who surf religious sites. Some Hindus the moment they switch on the computer, they go on to these sites, where they offer some prayers. I also understand that Muslims have religious websites which they visit four or five times a day for prayer. They have sites where they are able to have their 'namaz.' I have personally, because of the interest that I have in interfaith religions, visited these sites. I have gone on to the *Koran* on the web.

A senior adult, from the male focus group from the Bandra parishes, suggested that participation could help laypeople to better understand the faith:

Like, you will see that, throughout the church calendar, there are lots of feasts that have a lot of significance. All those things can be explained on the site and get people involved, even if it is a passage from the *Bible*. What are their interpretations? So, in that way, the Church also will get an idea how people are thinking. Then they will come to know if the people are thinking right or wrong.

Whether people are open or closed to using the net for religion

Although not many used the Internet for religious purposes, participants felt that people were ready and open to having religious content on the net. Some suggested that people needed easy access to religion in the midst of their daily life, which the Internet seemed to provide. Others felt that people were especially open to religion on the net in places and moments where regular practice of the faith was difficult, or not possible. Still others suggested that people were open to religious practices being adapted to the present times. Others, however, felt that only the younger generation would be open to religion on the Internet. Some disapproved of net usage for religion.

A lay computer professional, from the focus group at St. Joseph's Parish, Vikhroli, was of the opinion that people were open to using the net for religious purposes:

I think people are open to having, maybe, even a religious space or even a chapel, on the computer, because many people are working 12 or 14 hours a day. Many of the people are not able to come to Church. If there is a kind of spirituality on the net which will kind of ease our conscience, they would be willing to take it.

A priest felt that people would not leave the Church, but would like to use the net when they have no other options available:

Many people would object, saying that people would stop going to Church. Those objections are always there, but I guess, on the whole, people will still continue, especially in India or in Bombay. I was also thinking about people who are abroad in places like Saudi, who would want this support.

A member of the Basel Mission Church, Andheri, felt that only the younger generation would be open to using the Internet for religion:

I don't think the older people would like it. I think the younger generation will, or might, catch on to it, but the older people: for so many years they are in the habit of coming to the church, so I don't think they would be open to the Internet.

3.3.6 Expectations of what religious websites should be/not be

Expectation: Religious contents/presentation/web-characteristics

The fact that people had expectations of what religious websites should be, pointed to their being open to having religion on the Internet. This point was discussed by most of the focus groups and participants shared their expectations about religious websites in terms of content, presentation style and web characteristics. Participants voiced their opinions about what they wanted to see on religious websites and also what they did not expect from these websites. With regard to content, participants mostly agreed that religious websites should deal with information leading to a better understanding of their

own, and other, religions. Besides information and teachings about the faith, many felt that personal experiences and testimonies of people would be appreciated, as they help to concretize their appreciation and understanding of religion.

They also suggested that religious websites should be relevant to people's lives and current situations and help them to establish links between what they believed and what they were experiencing in their day-to-day routine. Some suggested that religious sites should offer aids to prayer, devotion, scripture study, and inspirational material that would be uplifting in its content. In terms of web characteristics; participants suggested that religious websites should be presented in an attractive, creative and interactive manner. Some individuals, however, disapproved of putting religious contents on the web and objected to having any religious ritual on the net. Others did not see the need for any interactivity in religious matters.

A woman Religious from the Daughters of St. Paul, suggested that what people expect from religious websites is correct teaching and doctrine about matters of faith, in view of the conflicting views and opinions prevalent today:

I think, what Catholics expect is something that would teach them, give them, substantial information of the faith, because they are getting misled by so many different sects. They are looking for answers, and sometimes they get onto sites which give them misleading answers. So, the Catholic websites should give them something that will be a substantial and correct perspective about the Catholic faith.

A junior member of the Priests' focus group felt that people surfing religious websites would be interested in parish information:

People might like also to go for a Parish profile, especially if they are moving into a new parish, some kind of summary profile of the Parish. They would like to know a little of the Parish, its priests, its institutions of higher education, things like the parish associations, the Parish programme, etc.

A male member of the focus group held at St. Joseph's parish, Vikhroli, working as a computer consultant, suggested that what people were mainly looking for was all kinds of information about their faith and their Church:

New information connected to our faith and Church, should be on the net, because at any point of time, people could be looking for anything. Somebody might be checking to see what their faith is all about. Somebody might want to know what's happening in other parts of the world in the Church. There should be, for every religion, an article, like you have the Vatican having all the information on Church.

An adult male, from the Bandra parishes group, stated that what people wanted was doctrine:

Religious teaching, yes, but it should be simple, People use a lot of jargon. They don't understand, and some times people get misled and, you know, people interpret the *Bible* in various ways.

A layman, from the adult focus group from St. Joseph's parish, Vikhroli, felt that religious websites could offer meaningful testimonies:

I would also look for people's testimonies, because that will show how many people (live their faith), know who they really are. Because there are many non-Catholic persons who come to see Catholic web sites, to see what is what. And if they would see the testimonies that would bring them more towards God, the people who are far from God. So basically we could put Testimonies and Sunday readings, sermons.

A woman Religious belonging to the Daughters of St. Paul, Bandra, suggested that religious websites should be tailored to the target audience:

Each audience needs its own style of presentation. If you are catering to youth, we need to use colors, and the medium and the music they would like, even the language, whatever. Youth today use a lot of SMS messages, so you could not use long sentence that would not be a youth category.

Expectation: The net presenting religion relevant to life

An adult from the male adult group from Bandra, felt that information should be relevant to people:

It should be, basically, not too authoritative, but it should be with the times. It is not like what my grandfather did or that, it should be modern and connected with what is going on at the present times.

A lay computer professional from the St. Joseph's Parish, Vikhroli, shared this comment about personal relevance of websites:

Something that would attract me to a web page is the first impression. The other thing is, how does it relate directly to my current situation? If I am very troubled and it says that 'All those who are weary and burdened come and they will find rest.' I would be really reading that, and following that. So, in short, something that directly relates to me and the current situation and something that is attractive, in a way.

A woman participant in the female focus group in Bandra, proposed that websites should not only give information, but should connect to today's situations and make faith challenging:

Discussing issues like how the *Bible* is relevant in today's situation. Also, maybe how to take my faith to a stronger level, so that it will challenge me not to take my faith so simply, but make me understand my belief in certain things. And, maybe, also how to put it across to children, to youth, so that when we are interacting with them, how we as adults can explain to them and give guidelines and directions.

A female youth group member, of the Dombivli youth group, affirmed that if a website displays religious content on the web it should be done in an intelligible manner especially appealing to youth:

Firstly, no jargon, because most of that happens on religious websites. There's so much of theology written, most lay persons can't understand a thing. So if it's in a... you know, lay-man-friendly language, it would be much better, because then you could apply it to your daily life. If you are reading everyday one page, and you apply it to your daily life, it becomes much, easier.

3.3.7 Perception of positive/ negative outcome of net usage

Many of the members felt that if the Internet were used for religious purposes it would make a positive difference to the people, and the Church itself. It could possibly bring people closer together as a community; there could be more interaction between the clergy and the laity, and there would be a chance for people to express themselves and make their voices heard. This could lead to an awakening among the laity. The church itself could become more vibrant and more relevant to peoples' lives. It could lead to a fruitful networking system within the Church, and stronger community support. However, there were some who felt that use of the Internet would not make any difference at all.

A layman from St. Joseph parish, Vikhroli, working in information technology felt that the use of the Internet would make a positive difference to the Christian community:

I believe the objective of the Kingdom of God is building bridges between God and man, and between man and man. So I believe the net would contribute largely in building bridges between man and man, and break down a lot of barriers. I do believe we will see people, who are always on the move, always communicating with each other. It would be easier if we could have a common web base, if somebody needs to interact with another.

A younger member of the clergy was of the opinion that the Internet could provide the church with the opportunity to become relevant to the times, playing a central role in people's lives.

If I was looking at the Church when we were kids, the Church was the central point, like a hub, all the activities were there. With the changing scenario, people started moving away from the Church, because they found entertainment and information in other places. They found that they could be served better in other places. So this is, once again, a good opportunity to make the Church the central point of anyone's life, where you have access to many things through the Internet.

A participant of the Basel Mission Church, Andheri, envisaged the Church of the future as being a cyberchurch while not approving of it:

To be honest, I really believe that down the years it would be something like cyber church. They wouldn't mind having a Mass on the net. Though, personally, I don't believe in it, I think there would be a possibility of something like a cyberchurch where things are online, or the Internet. I think the possibilities in the future are huge, of course. I do not support it, but looking at the world around, it is possible.

A younger member of the clergy visualized a revitalized church, brought about by greater use of the Internet:

I see lots of possible changes, compared with now, with regard to ourselves and the ministries as well. When people have more access, there will be more interaction and, once again, the church will become central and its networks will have a wider area of influence, with associations, and that will provide more information to the Church.

Another young priest saw the possibilities of the net being used for renewal and solidarity for the Church of the future:

I think a lot of groups may use this in the future for promoting a certain kind of a world view, religious or otherwise. If we are talking of some updating of people who are religious, It will probably be used as a means for bringing people together virtually, and things like that.

A layman, from the seniors' group from the Bandra parishes, pointed to the benefits of transparency and a new vibrancy, that could come about because of using the Internet:

I think there will be more vibrancy. I would think that there would be more information spread, so that people will know more things which they never knew, that would give the Church certain relevance as to why they are doing things. Many people are doing things just because their fathers were doing so. It was an obligation. But if it is explained, then they would know, then they would participate in it more.

A participant, from the senior woman group from the Bandra parishes did not see the use of the Internet making any difference to the people or the Church:

We would continue to be our selfish selves. I don't know. It would not make a difference.

Another woman, from the same focus group had a similarly negative view of the net:

I, too, feel the same, because the world is moving very fast. Today's generation is moving faster than any other, so the Church will not be able to keep pace with them, I think.

3.3.8 What needs to be done to use the net more fruitfully

Members of the different focus groups had a lot of suggestions about what needs to be done in order to use the Internet more effectively for religious purposes. In general, they felt that there needs to be more awareness created about the possibility of using the net for religion, and this could be achieved by giving publicity to existing efforts, and religious websites already on the net. They felt the Church should encourage those involved and get a greater collaborative effort in this area. Some members felt that the clergy should take the initiative and leadership in using the Internet for religion, and the clergy should be open to using the net in more ways, for the promotion of religion. Others felt that the Church should get the laity involved, especially the youth. There should be more interaction between clergy and laity, and a greater role for lay participation in the Church. It was also proposed that every parish should have a web site, and that diocesan websites should be linked together for greater collaboration and sharing; that there should be a monitoring body that would keep a check on the authenticity of doctrine and guidance in religious matters. Some suggested that training and formation on net usage should be provided.

A woman Religious from the Daughters of St. Paul, Bandra, was of the opinion that the most important task that needed to be addressed was publicity for the use of the Internet:

First of all, information; many people do not know that religious websites are available. Publicity is needed. We need to tell our Catholics that the Church in Bombay has got a site. We have our Catholic papers that we can use for publicity, and we can pass on information. Putting what websites are available and making the congregations aware of the usage of the net would help.

A member of the priests' focus group proposed that everyone could help in creating awareness of religious websites:

I think there is one possibility, if everybody could send interesting sites to visit, which they have visited during the week, especially those that are useful, that would help to establish links, as everybody does not have time to surf the web. I think we have to feed it to them. Then people may access it.

A woman, from the senior women's group from the Bandra parishes, said that the Church should make the effort to reach people where they are:

The Church used to be the center of activities in the past, but now the people do not want the trouble of coming to the Church. But this way, one can stay at home and access, in a sense, to a certain extent the same community feeling of the Church. I think the Church has to make some kind of entry into the virtual world.

A woman Religious, from the Bandra focus group, proposed that a collaborative effort between clergy and laity would help to get the church started on the web:

Let the clergy take a more active part and interact with the laity. Know what the younger generation wants, or what it expects from the Church, in the form of technology or communication, or the media of the church.

A lay man, from St. Joseph's Parish Vikhroli, was of the opinion that there should be roles for the laity and clergy that each should fulfill, if the net were to be used effectively:

I think it should be guided by the clergy, but the majority of work will be done by the laity and maybe we could network together. What I feel is, if you start to get the laity into doing something, they will feel that they can do something and that would start a real network between the priests and the laity. I think the initiative has to come from the clergy itself. It has to be set up, and the network would have to be built.

A layman, from the men's focus group in Bandra, thought that the Church should look at the net as a means for meeting and catering for the different needs of the believers.

I think, probably, the Church has to look into it as meeting different types of needs. I think, right now, there is also a need of those people who can't access the Church. People who are house-bound, who are sick. There are travelers who want to go for a Sunday Mass. Those who are in a remote part of India, or elsewhere. I think the Church should recognize that there are temporary needs, and should do something.

A lay computer professional from the St. Joseph's Parish Vikhroli group, proposed that the Church should take concrete steps towards using the Internet for religious purposes:

I think the Church should now go in top gear in having the net and making a website for every parish a compulsory feature. I think we should have youth, for consulting, available to parishes who think that they don't know how to get started. Or, put a priest or laypeople into those parishes, who know about these things, and will launch out in top gear. We must make this sort of level of communication compulsory.

A female member of the same Vikhroli parish group, felt that to have websites in every parish would be mutually helpful:

Every parish should have a web site. It should be like every community, I mean, like Vincent de Paul, the Bombay Catholic Sabha, the Catholic youth, so that they can interact and share.

A member of the priests' group felt steps should also be taken on the Archdiocesan level to seek professional and technical expertise in being present on the Internet:

The Archdiocesan website has to be very professional to attract people to it. There are too many things in the present one, and people are not going to it. It is definitely not a professional one. They are not getting what is available from the website. If you think that this is going to be the future, and it is, then web designing has to be undertaken and done by a professional.

A layman working in the information technology field, from St. Joseph's parish, Vikhroli, felt that the clergy should be better trained to utilize the resources of the internet:

All priests should be given training. It should be made compulsory. All priests should be net savvy, they should be trained for the net. In fact, they should be taught how to e-mail, update the website for Church and things like that.

A seminarian was of the opinion that training should be offered to the seminarians at the earliest, so that they could be at home with these newer means of communication:

I think the church should introduce a media course in the first year of the seminary. Life is very fast and people have a very short time. So, within that short time, we have to introduce very effective media. But, in the Church, they are not using these newer means, they are still in the old style. We are still caught up with buildings. We are not part of the media, so the numbers of people in Church are going down.

3.3.9 Perceptions of different groups of users

Perceptions of youth about the Internet usage for religion

From observing the perceptions of participants in various groups, it can be observed that, of all the focus groups, the youth groups expressed their opinions forcefully about several issues. Many of the youth were quite vocal about not using the Internet for religious rituals, like the Mass, while, at the same time, seeing the possibility of using the Internet for other religious purposes. They also questioned whether the authorities of the Church structures would be open to the Internet, as it would challenge them. These forceful views were expressed by male and female youth from different youth groups.

A female member of a youth group of the Infant Jesus parish, Dombivli, questioned the use of the Internet for major religious rituals:

You can have on the net, maybe a prayer, a psalm or a hymn, yes, but, say, a whole Mass? That wouldn't be possible, because you have to celebrate Mass as a community. It has to be a communitarian affair. I feel Christianity is more

community oriented than any other religion, you know. I wouldn't like to pray all by myself, I'd like to have my friends, my parents, with me when I pray, because it's a more family thing, and binds us together.

A male, from the St. John Baptist parish, Thane, youth group, had a similar objection to having rituals on the net:

Having something like that, the Mass on the net, loses its significance. When you come for Mass you attend Mass, beside in Church there is a different feeling. Firstly it won't be the same if you sat at home and switched on the computer and looked at ten other things simultaneously. It loses its significance.

Another male youth member of the St. John Baptist, Thane, youth, pointed out that there is no need to use a medium like the Internet for religion, as it may lower religious standards to some extent:

Everything is being dumbed down to make it simpler. The point is, you have to retain a level of..., you can't simplify things to a point where it loses a meaning. Delivering a message, you also need a kind of a level of spirituality, which will be lost if you keep dumbing it down. Oral tradition is a very powerful tradition. Visual aids may help, but I think the point is to deliver what you are good at in the best way you can. It is not necessarily to shift the medium, but what you are doing do better. .

A male member of the Thane youth group, suggested that the challenge for the church would be felt by the Church's authority, threatened by people's confrontation:

The problem will be that, once you have more information, you will have more questions. On the web, you read different opinions and have doubts. The doubts have to be clarified by the clergy. I wonder whether the clergy are capable of clearing the doubts. I sometimes find they dictate. They don't want you to ask questions. Whether the clergy is capable of handling the doubts, which dissemination of information has given, that is more important.

A male youth from the St. John Baptist, Thane, felt the problems were lack of promotion of the internet as a means for propagating religion, and lack of expertise with the net.

Personally, I feel the idea is not well marketed. An idea by itself is nothing, it has to be marketed, has to be published, and that is not happening here. We also need the clergy to be involved and they should be sufficiently savvy to do that. And I don't think we have that, very few priests would be able to do this.

Perception of seniors about Internet usage for religion

With regard to the use of the Internet for religious purposes, the seniors were fairly open and did not have strong opinions against the use of the Internet. They were more concerned with the possible negative effects of wrong interpretation of doctrine, or people leaving the church. Some were concerned that using the Internet would be an elitist choice. Seniors were not strongly critical of Church authority, but expected more guidance and direction from the clergy.

A member of the senior women's group from the Bandra parishes, expressed disapproval of using the internet for religion.

The use of the internet boils down to the fact that this kind of creates, or becomes, an elitist group. It is just accessible to those who have the access to the net, so the group cannot be replaced. That is why I call it elitist. Only those who are able to, whatever good is there in the computer, it cannot replace the group.

Perception of Priests about Internet usage for religion

Priest participants in the focus group appeared to be open to the use of the Internet for religious purposes and did not see any threat to their authority, or to religion itself. Some priests appeared to be critical of Church authority and faulted the lack of support needed for greater use of the Internet in pastoral initiatives.

A priest working in a city parish, felt that the Church in Mumbai, while being open to using the Internet for religious purposes, was still not open to religious services on the Internet:

With regards to services, I don't know how much in Bombay will people accept that. I know when a priest introduced that Blessed Sacrament online, there were many who reacted saying: 'Why should we have it?' All that was suggested was, while you are at the computer, if you want to spend some time in prayer, it was left to you. But, in Bombay, I'm not convinced, if there's Mass on the Internet, people will stop coming to Church, because for them coming to Church is still very important.

Another young priest, working in a city parish, felt that there is an openness and possibility for using the web for religion and people are experimenting with it:

At the moment, I found that parishioners of mine who are working in places like Saudi, where there is no real access to a Church, normally they use e-mail, to talk about what's happening, what's their struggles. Maybe it feels that visiting the Church site is like visiting the Church. I know many people who are doing it, working together. It helps them to keep in touch with the Church.

Another priest felt people are slowly adapting their religious needs to the new technology:.

Basically, this is also a paradigm shift to new ways of worshipping. I guess we have to accept this technology is going to bring about changes in behaviour. I think people are just picking up the possibilities...they don't know much of the possibilities, but it's definitely increasing.

A member of the clergy was of the opinion that the Internet could bring about a new opportunity for the laity to play a more effective role in today's church:

I foresee a great awakening of the laity, it will make me, as a priest, much more responsible, because it gives the laity an opportunity to check what I have said, and clarify issues. Just now I think you would have hardly four or five people who will come and question something that you said about the faith aspect. But I think with the greater use of the internet there would be greater involvement of the laity in questioning and expressing their own views.

Perception of clergy's usage of the net for religious purposes

The laity felt that the clergy are open to utilizing the Internet for religious purposes, but they do not have the skills, the expertise and the commitment to utilize the potential of the net. Some suggested that a better use of the Internet would imply ongoing formation and updating of skills for senior clergy and an active involvement of lay expertise.

A computer savvy layman, from the Bandra parish was of the opinion that priests were interested in using the net, but lacked expertise and guidance:

The clergy; I have spoken to some of them, and they want to use it. They definitely want to use it. They want to use it and to develop it, but, then, how do they go about it? But they don't know how to do that. I think most Fathers want to do that, but they are just not too comfortable with it. They do not know how to go about it.

A business professional, layman from another Bandra parish, suggested that utilizing the net for religion would depend on the clergy working in collaboration with the laity:

Basically, this is a Church thing, and the initiative has to come from them with regards to spreading it and the technical knowledge required in driving it, or the marketing knowledge, or whatever, that will come from the laity. It is only if both of them put their heads together, I think, we will see that this project will be successful.

A married woman, of a parish in Bandra, had this opinion of the priests of her parish:

I don't think the older priests are using the computers, because to learn the computers you have to have that courage and to update yourself. But I don't know what is their ideas. I think, by and by, they will have to learn, and they have to be up to date with the people of the world.

A seminarian thought they had to catch up with the pace of modern living and utilize the media more effectively to make an impact today:

We are still in our old style we are not running with the pace of the world, still slow. We have to read the signs of the time... There are so many people who are computer literate and do they do fantastic presentation, etc... I think something is wrong in our

seminary formation. I think more emphasis should be given to media applications at the seminary.

Another seminarian was of the opinion that the formation of the young priest ceases once he passed out from the seminary:

There is no continuity from the seminary to the priesthood. Once people are ordained, there is no ongoing formation. We are at least five to six years behind, what I mean is, the continuity from the seminary to priesthood. How many parishes really have their own web sites? Many people would come to our websites to get some information, say, about different aspects of the Church....

3.3.10. Conclusion - Follow up to the Focus groups

After conducting the focus group discussions with the nine different groups at nine different locations in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, it became evident that the responses were becoming repetitive, with no significant new data emerging from the latter groups. Hence, it was decided that there was a sufficient body of data generated from the exercise of conducting these focus groups, to be used for the study. The data collected represented responses of a fairly representative sample of male and female participants, belonging to different age groups with different types of affiliation and membership of the Church, from different parishes and locations in the city of Mumbai.

From the discussions one could conclude that, while the Internet was being used to some extent for religious purposes by some respondents, there were other respondents who were not aware of the religious potential of the Internet, nor were they using the net for religion. Among the uses of the Internet, the predominant use was to obtain religious information and doctrinal aids. However, youth, in particular, and some adults, did not

perceive the Internet as a substitute for Catholic religious practices, rituals and community life.

Acknowledging that, at present, the net was not being used very much for religious purposes, some of the respondents felt the causes were either that net users were not aware of the potential of the net for religion, or that they did not have the necessary expertise, or could not afford the Internet. Another reason for poor usage was the nature of the Internet itself, which was seen to be non-conducive to religion because of its distracting and confusing nature, with too many divisive interests and too much choice. The participants also blamed the clergy, whom they perceived as not interested and not skilled in net technology, and consequently not promoting the net or offering direction, guidance and encouragement to the laity to use the net for religion.

However, the participants felt that Catholics are inclined to using the Internet for religion. This was suggested from their expectations of how and what religious websites should offer, their foreseeing of positive results from using the Internet for religion and the strategies they visualized in order that the Internet might, in the future, be better used in the Archdiocese of Mumbai.

Chapter 4. – Survey Questionnaire, Methodology and Findings

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts, the first deals with the methodology used for the subsequent research undertaken, and the second deals with the actual findings of this research effort. The tool used to obtain relevant data was a survey questionnaire; and the first section explains the aims and objective of the questionnaire, how the questionnaire was prepared and subsequently administered. This is followed up by a profile of the various types of groups of respondents to whom the questionnaire was administered. In part two, the findings of the research are grouped under the fourteen questions that were part of the questionnaire. The responses received are presented through tables and charts that project a fairly comprehensive picture of the research undertaken in the Archdiocese of Mumbai. Each table is briefly explained to highlight the main findings with regard to the use/non use of the Internet for religious purposes. The perceptions of the users about religious usage/ non usage of the net and related issues, are further explored on the basis of sex, age and the religious affiliation of the respondents.

Part 1 Methodology of the Survey Questionnaire

4.1. Objective of the Questionnaire:

The purpose of this questionnaire was mainly to test out the findings of the focus group with a larger sample of respondents to see whether the findings of the focus groups, which were necessarily made up of a small number of people would be corroborated or negated by the responses of a larger sample of respondents from the Archdiocese of

Mumbai. The second purpose was to reach categories or groups of people not fully covered by the focus groups, to respond to the questions discussed by the focus groups. One category of people that was not covered by the focus group was non-users of the Internet/email, and these were included in this effort in order to ascertain their perceptions and opinions.

The Questionnaire: This questionnaire was entirely based on the responses received from the focus groups conducted in Mumbai, and the questions were structured and not open-ended, so that the responses would be oriented towards confirming or rejecting the findings of the focus groups. Morgan points out the use of focus groups in combination with a survey questionnaire.

First they (focus groups) are used as a self contained method of studies, in which they serve as the principal source of data. Second, they are used as a supplementary source of data in studies that rely on some other method such as a survey. Third they are used in multi-method studies that combine two or more means of gathering data in which no one primary method determines the use of the other (1997:2)

The questionnaire was made up of fourteen questions put together from the major findings of the focus groups. The questionnaire started with general questions, gradually leading to the use of the Internet for general and religious purposes. The central questions dealt directly with the purposes for which the net could be used and the respondents had to affirm whether they used the net for that specific purpose. The same also applied to the possible spiritual/ religious purposes for which the net could be used. With this question, it was hoped that there would be a clear indication of whether the respondents used the net, or not, and for what purposes, while at the same time giving a

fair picture of their perception of how others, clergy or laity, used the net. The rest of the questions would reflect on issues related to reasons for net use or lack of it; people's expectations of how the net could or should be used by the laity and the clergy; the changing roles and strategies to be employed if the net were to be more effectively used for religious purposes; and the difference it could bring about in the religious practices and culture of the people were the Internet to be used for religious purposes in the Archdiocese of Mumbai. With the help of an Indian Media Bureau of Research International (IMRBI) consultant, the format of the questionnaire was drawn up so that respondents would circle or tick the relevant responses. Every question had choices to cover the responses already received in the focus groups while at the same time leaving room to add new ones. (Appendix IV)

Respondents of the Survey Questionnaire:

A 1000 copies of the survey questionnaire were printed and distributed to groups and individuals in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, directly through personal contact, or with the assistance of associates. Of the forms distributed 750 were filled and duly returned. The following describes the groups of respondents who filled the questionnaire, and how the questionnaire was administered to them.

1. Catholic Women Religious of Mumbai

On the occasion of a one-day seminar held at the Canossa Convent, Mahim, Mumbai on the Ethics of the Internet, this questionnaire was administered for the first time. About

170 participants from all over the city and suburbs, representing all religious congregations working in Mumbai, had assembled for the seminar. The questionnaire was handed out to the participants before the seminar began, with a brief explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire. A majority of these religious woman respondents were non users of the Internet.

2. The parishioners of the Good Shepherd Parish, Andheri, Mumbai

An appeal was made to the congregation at the Sunday Mass at the Good Shepherd Church, a suburban parish, and parishioners were invited to remain after the Sunday services in the morning and evening. Questionnaires were distributed and filled on the spot, following a brief explanation. Each question was explained before the form was filled in. The respondents who volunteered were from all sections of the parish and comprised users and also non users as well, interested in filling in the survey. About 125 respondents accepted the invitation after the Sunday services.

3. Youth group and adult members of Infant Jesus Parish, Dombivli

The third group of respondents were members of the thirty different youth groups of this distant, newly erected, suburban parish of the Infant Jesus Parish, Dombivli. The assistant parish priest volunteered to get the questionnaire filled by youth as well as by adults in the parish, and 30 forms were returned. All these respondents were net users.

4. Members of Youth Group, St. Michael's Parish, Mahim

Young adults who filled in the questionnaire came from this city parish through the efforts of their priest director, who volunteered to contact the youth and get the forms filled in. Twenty respondents sent in their questionnaire, most of them net users.

5. Members of the Wellsprings Lay Theology group

The questionnaire was administered to this sizeable group of lay people undergoing the Wellsprings Theology Course. This group met regularly for a series of weekend seminars over three months at St. Joseph's Parish, Juhu, Mumbai. The group comprised of around 150 participants, mostly of the 35 and above age group, who come from a cross section of parishes from all over Mumbai. The group was made up of a mixture of people involved in parish activities, some desirous of deepening their knowledge of the faith, some wanting to get more involved in Church activities and some who had retired and wished to use their spare time in deepening their understanding of the faith. A large number of the respondents were not regular users of the Internet.

6. Priests of the Andheri Deanery

On the occasion of the monthly deanery meeting of the priests, the questionnaire was administered to 25 priests who had gathered for the deanery meeting at Good Shepherd Church, Andheri. The survey forms were distributed before their monthly seminar meeting, with a brief explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire. The group was composed of users and non-users of the Internet, with the younger priests using the net more than the seniors, who were mostly non-users.

7. Parishioners of St. Paul's Parish, Dadar, Mumbai

Members of the Sunday congregation of the parish of St. Paul's Dadar, a city parish, were invited to fill up the questionnaire after the morning services, and about 40 participants obliged and filled up the questionnaire following an initial explanation of the purpose of the exercise. Those who did so were mostly users of the Internet and others familiar with it. Some non-users also filled in the questionnaire.

8. Students of the Bible Study Classes, St. Pius College, Goregaon

Yet another large group of respondents were students of the Bible-Study Classes held year-long, every Sunday, at St. Pius College, Goregaon. These lay students came from various parishes of Mumbai, a large number were young adults who were interested in studying the scriptures for personal needs, or for assisting with their regular parish commitments and activities. Around 100 participants filled up the questionnaire with a fair mixture of users and non-users.

9. Teachers of St. John the Baptist High School, Thane,

About 15 teachers from this suburban school volunteered to fill in the questionnaire at the request of their principal. These staff members were infrequent users of the Internet.

10. Seminary students for the Priesthood, St. Pius College, Goregaon, Mumbai

Another group of 15 seminarians and 10 representatives of the seminary staff filled in the questionnaire. All seminarians were regular users of the Internet and e-mail, and most of the staff use Internet/e-mail fairly regularly.

11. Students of the Sacrament of Confirmation, Good Shepherd Parish, Andheri

About 30 students preparing to receive the sacrament of confirmation, regular attendees of these preparatory classes, were invited to fill out the questionnaire. Most students were below the age of twenty-one and were regular users of Internet/ e-mail.

12. Small groups/ Individuals

Besides the groups mentioned above, there were also smaller groups and individuals who volunteered to fill in the questionnaire and helped in passing on the questionnaire to others. These include members of Protestant groups and a few non-Christian individuals.

Part II Findings of the survey questionnaire

4.2 Media profile of the respondents

Question 1. Which media the respondents used currently

Table 1

Quantitative analysis

Group	Sex			Age			Religious Gp.			
	All	Males	Females	!24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
Total	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Television	87.6	88.3	88.2	92.9	87.6	86.8	90.4	76.9	89.5	89.5
VCR's	6.9	5.7	7.5	6.5	7.7	6.6	4.4	3.8	17.3	5.3
Radio	34.0	43.1	27.3	61.3	33.1	23.0	36.9	38.5	16.5	63.2
Cinema	10.5	12.7	9.4	23.5	9.5	5.8	11.9	5.8	7.5	10.5
Newspapers	87.5	89.3	86.6	87.4	89.3	88.4	85.6	96.2	93.2	94.7
Magazines	46.8	44.8	48.9	42.8	47.9	49.9	39.6	61.5	68.4	63.2
Internet	46.4	57.5	39.5	67.0	53.3	36.1	51.3	61.5	15.8	89.5
Others	2.0	3.0	1.4	4.8	1.2	1.3	2.1	3.8	2.3	0.0

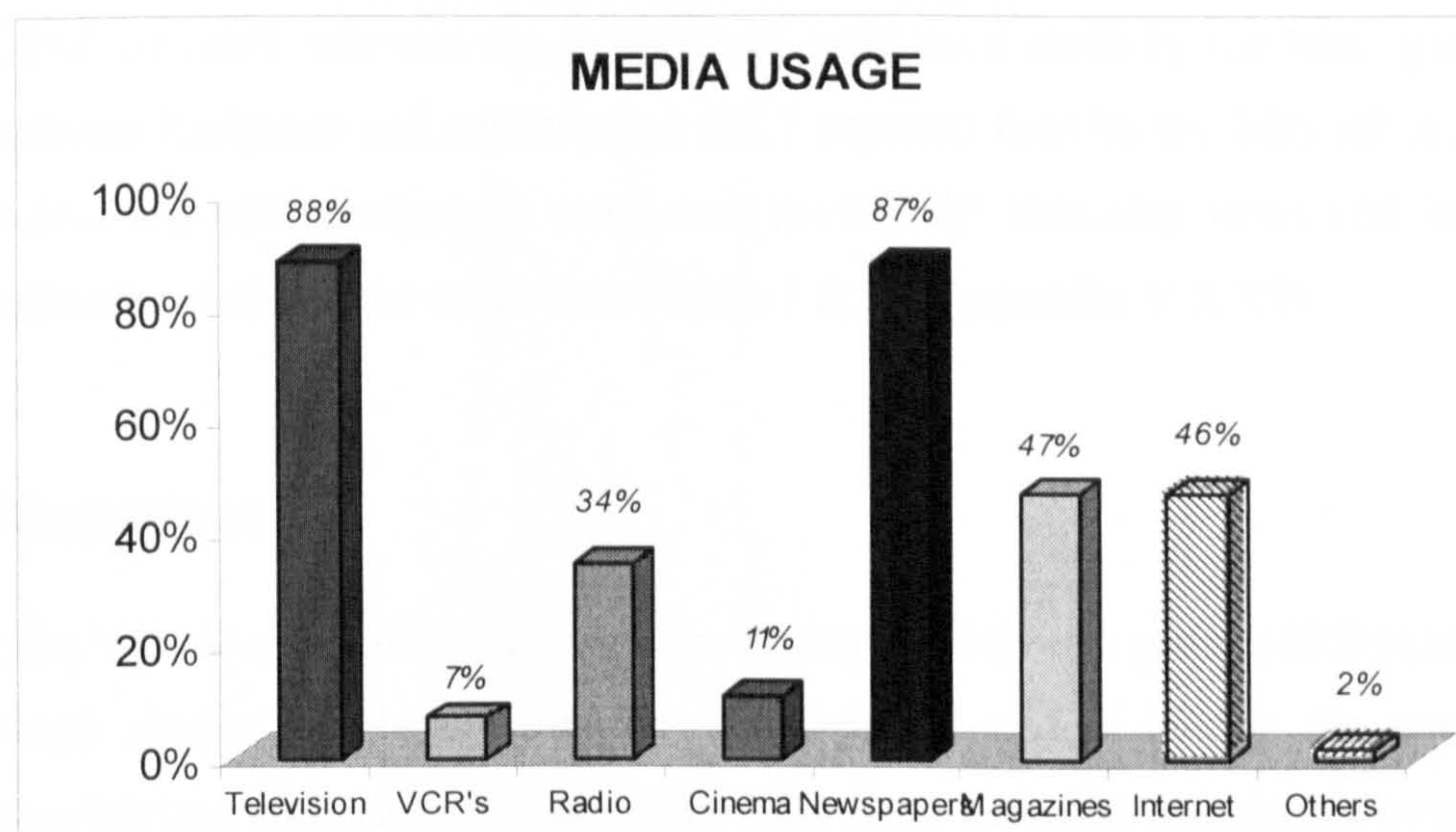


Chart 1.

Table Key:

- Except for the 'All' row, all the figures are percentages in each respective group.
- In the age groups the three classifications are (1) Below 24 years, (2) 25 to 34 years and (3) 35 and above.
- In the religious affiliation group, the categories are (1) Laity, (2) Priests, (3) Women religious, (4) Seminarians

Media Profile of the respondents

The first question of the survey questionnaire was meant to give a media profile of the respondents and provide a general picture of their media habits. The second question probed the reasons why respondents used each particular media. This picture will provide a general framework of popular media use within which the use of the Internet will subsequently be located.

Television and Newspapers:

The most popular media are television (87.6 percent) and the newspapers (87.5 percent), which are used by an very equally high percentage of both male and female respondents, from all age groups. Among the religious affiliation groups the laity (90.4 percent) would appear to use television more than the priests, women Religious and seminarians (85.2 percent), whereas the newspapers were used more by the latter groups of priests women Religious and seminarians (94.7 percent) than by the laity (85.6 percent). Both television and newspapers were used mainly for obtaining news and information, for entertainment and for relaxation (Table 2 &5). (Appendix V & VI)

Magazines:

The highest users of magazines were among the 35+ age group (49.9 percent), and there were almost double the number of magazine readers among the women religious, seminarians and priests as among the laity (39.6 percent). Magazines were more popular among females (48.9 percent) than males and were used, like newspapers and television, for news, relaxation and entertainment (Table 6). (Appendix VII)

Radio:

The radio habit was highest in male and female teenagers (61.3 percent), and diminished with age. Like their young lay counterparts, seminarians were the heaviest listeners (63.2 percent), using it for relaxation and news (Table 4). (Appendix VIII)

VCR's and Cinema:

VCRs appear to be going out of use. Only the religious women had a few users (17.3 percent), using them for entertainment. Cinema for entertainment was found mainly in the lay young movie-goers (23.5 percent) and cinema visits diminished with age (Table 3 & 7). (Appendix IX & X)

4.2.1 – Use of the Internet

Question 2.6 Current usage of Internet

Table 9

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex		Age			Religious group				Sem.
	All	Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	
Total	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Users										
Yesterday	33%	43.5	26.8	43.6	36.7	28.8	38.8	48.1	9.8	21.1
In 7 days	20%	22.7	18.8	23.4	23.1	17.7	20.0	17.3	15.8	63.2
In 4 weeks	6%	8.0	5.4	9.1	5.9	5.5	7.1	9.6	4.5	5.3
In 3 mths	5%	4.7	5.2	9.6	5.3	2.6	5.0	7.7	3.8	5.3
In 12 mths	2%	1.3	2.8	1.8	3.6	1.8	2.3	0.0	3.8	0.0
> 12 mths	1%	0.7	1.4	.6	1.8	1.1	1.0	0.0	2.3	0.0
Never	26%	17.4	31.1	8.8	18.9	35.6	21.3	13.5	48.1	0.0
Dontknow	3%	0.7	4.0	.6	3.0	3.4	1.7	0.0	6.0	5.3

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row, all the figures are percentages, in each respective group
- In the age groups, the three classifications are 1. Below 24 years, 2. 25 to 34 years and 3. 35 years and above.
- In the religious group, the categories are 1. Laity, 2. Priests, 3. Women religious, 4. Seminarians

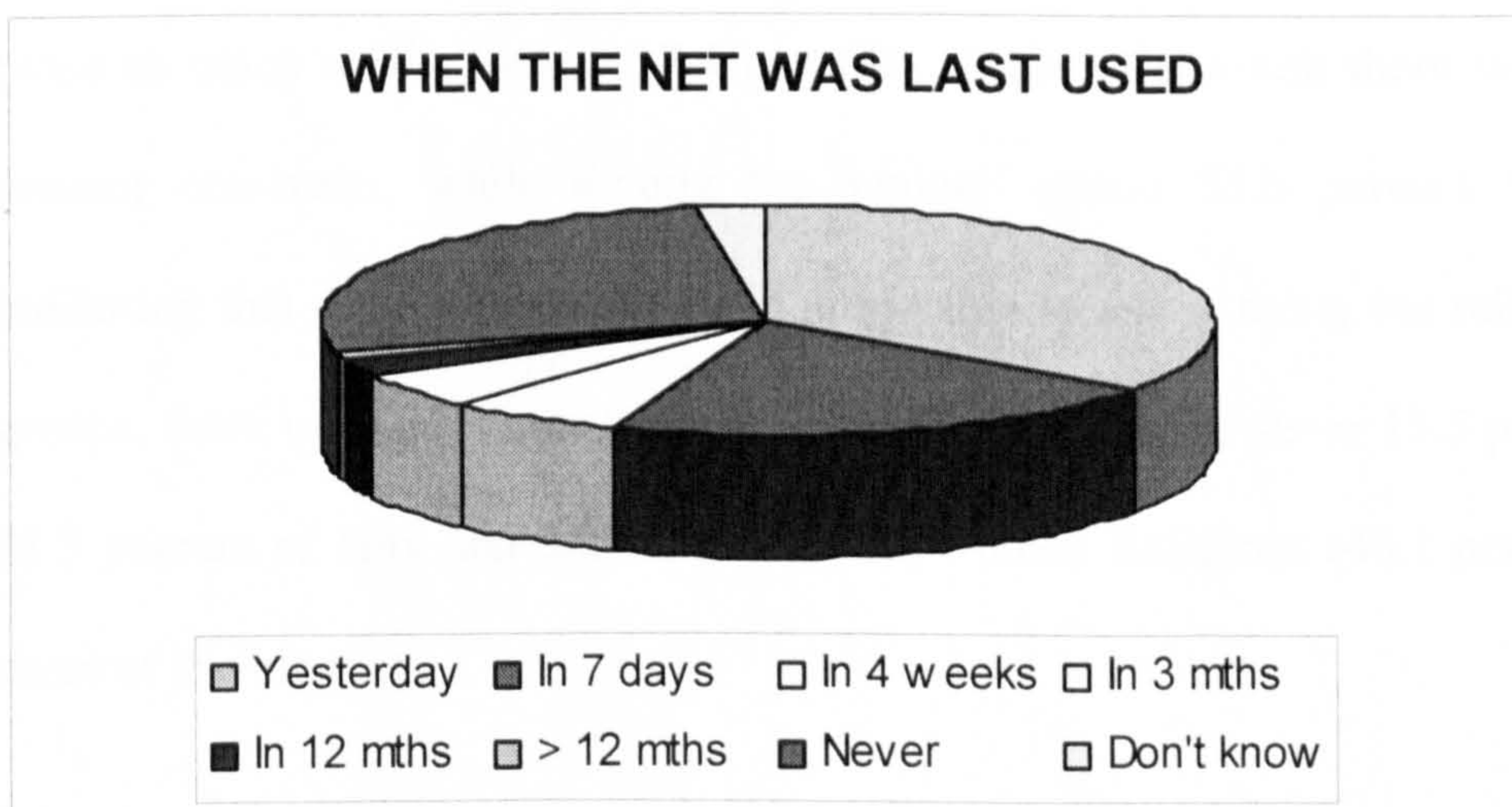


Chart 9. Current usage of the Internet

4.2.1. Current usage of the Internet

A third of the respondents (33.3 percent) were net users to some degree, while a quarter of the respondents (25.7 percent) did not use the net at all, or had stopped using it. Male users (43.5 percent) outnumbered females (26.8 percent) in using the net on a regular basis. The highest daily usage of the net was among the young (43.6 percent), while the least usage was among the thirty-five years plus group (28.8 percent). Among the religious affiliation groups, the highest current users were the priests, with almost half of the priest being users (48.1 percent), the second highest were the laity and the least users were among the women Religious (9.8 percent). An overwhelming majority of the seminarians (63.2 percent) had used the net during the last week,

Non-users of the net

About a quarter of the respondents said that they did not use the net at all, or had not used it for quite some time. Of these non-users, females (31.1 percent) were almost twice as many as the males (17.4 percent). Among the youth there were less than 10 percent non-users, while among the seniors' group 35.6 percent were non-users, indicating that non-users increased in proportion to age. Among the religious affiliation groups, there were no non-users among the seminarians, however 13.5 percent of priests, 21.3 percent of laity and almost half of the women Religious (48.1 percent) were non-users of the Internet.

4.2.2 Frequency of Internet use

Question 4. How frequent was the use of the Internet

Table 10

Quantitative Analysis

	Total 750	Males 299	Females 425	24&< 167	25/34 169	35> 379	Laity 480	Clergy 52	W.Relig 133	Sem. 19
Daily	19%	24.7	16.5	24.3	16.6	19.5	25.6	17.3	4.5	0.0
5/6/week	7%	9.4	5.9	11.4	8.3	5.5	8.8	9.6	1.5	5.3
2/4/week	12%	13.4	11.8	14.9	11.8	11.3	11.5	17.3	8.3	21.1
1/week	12%	14.7	9.6	13.3	14.2	10.3	11.5	15.4	8.3	47.4
1 in 2wks.	6%	8.4	5.4	10.8	8.9	3.7	6.0	13.5	3.0	26.3
Every4wk	2%	1.0	2.4	1.2	4.1	1.1	1.7	0.0	3.0	0.0
Less Often	11%	11.0	10.1	7.8	13.6	10.0	10.6	5.8	13.5	5.3
NeverNow	24%	14.7	31.1	14.9	20.1	30.1	19.0	13.5	51.1	0.0

Table Key:

- The categories in the first column refer to how frequently people use the net
- 5/6, 2/3 week = The net is used 5 or 6 times a week, 2 or 3 times etc.
- NeverNow = The net is never used now

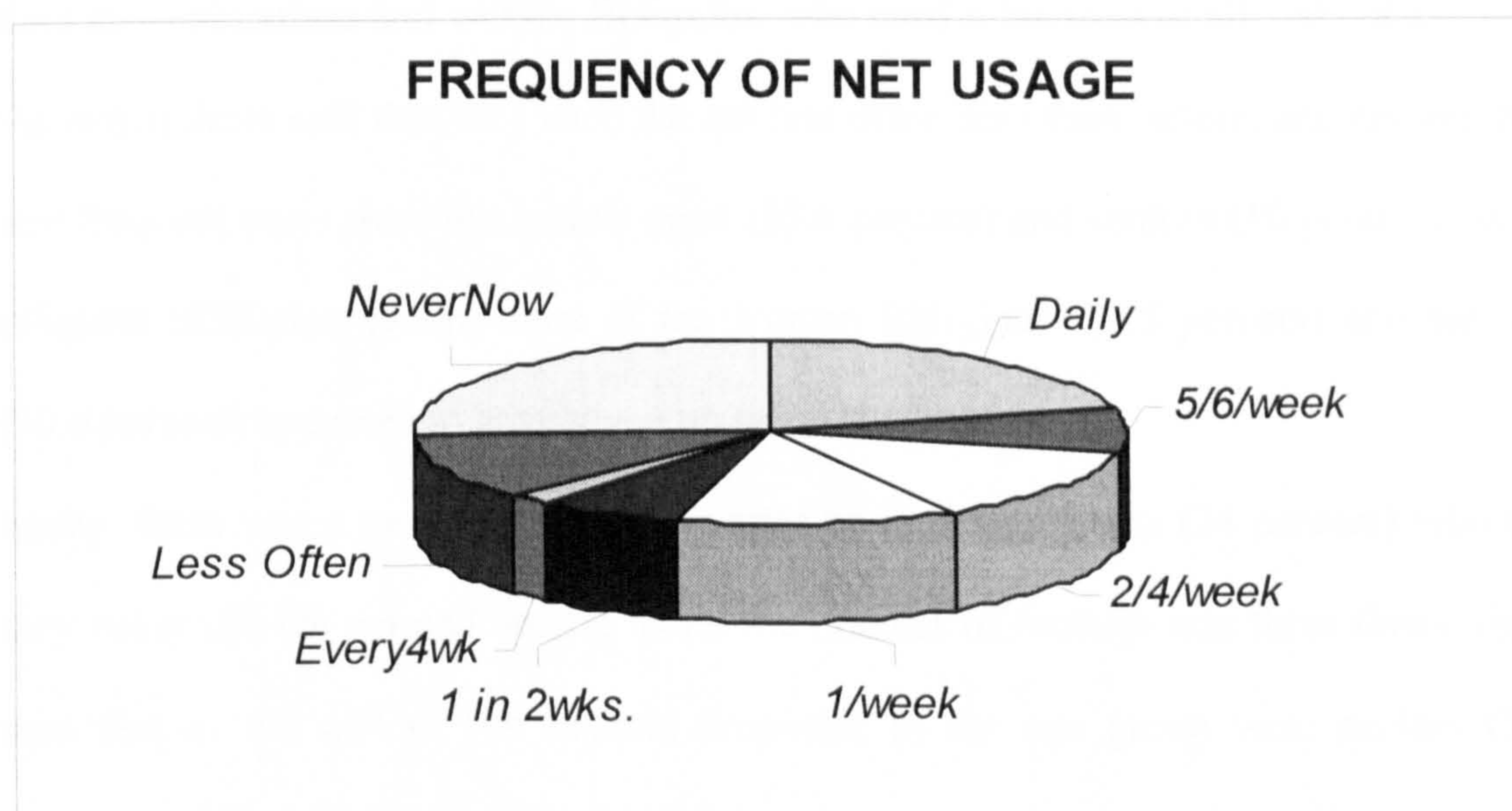


Chart 10. Frequency of use of the Net

Of the respondents who were users of the net, about a fifth (19.5 percent) said that they used the net daily for their various needs. Almost one fourth of daily net users were young adults (24.3 percent). The second highest frequency of users was between two to four times a week (12 percent). A little over a tenth of users of all age groups used the net once-in-a-week

Among the religious affiliation groups, the laity were the most regular of daily net users, with one fourth of their group (25.6 percent) accessing the net daily. Interestingly, none of the seminarians appeared to access the net on a daily basis, but, almost half of the seminarians (47.4 percent) used the Internet once a week. Among those using the net two to four times a week were 21 percent of seminarians and 17 percent of priests. In the religious affiliation grouping of those using the internet between five to six times a week, priest net users (9.6 percent) and the laity (5.5 percent) used the net more often than the seminarians and women Religious, who used it the least of all. About a tenth of the respondents said that they used the net less often now than before, and among these less frequent users were the middle aged (13.6 percent) and seniors (10 percent). In the religious affiliation group, more of the women Religious (13.5 percent) and the laity (10.6 percent) appeared to have given up using the Internet.

Lastly, there was a group of about a quarter of the respondents (24 percent) who said they never use the net and among them, the number of females was three times higher than that of the males. The highest drop-outs in the age group were seniors (30.1 percent) followed by the middle aged (20.1 percent). In the religious affiliation group about half of the women Religious respondents (51.1 percent) said they did not use the net now, the next highest drop-outs being from the ranks of the laity (19 percent).

4.2.3. General purposes of the Internet

Question 5A For what general purposes was the Internet used?

Table 11

Qualitative Analysis

Group	Total	Sex		Age			Religious group			Sem.
		Males	Female	24<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	
	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Uses										
Relating	62.3	73.6	55.5	82.8	69.2	52.5	69.6	80.8	27.8	89.5
Belong	13.9	17.7	11.5	22.2	14.2	11.1	15.4	21.2	9.8	10.5
Inform	46.9	59.9	39.3	65.4	56.2	37.2	53.5	61.5	21.8	84.2
Work	37.3	48.8	30.1	45.9	47.3	31.1	44.0	40.4	12.0	52.6
Study	36.5	45.8	31.3	57.7	46.2	25.3	40.0	55.8	15.0	78.9
Relax	30.9	41.5	24.7	66.6	32.5	16.9	39.2	26.9	6.8	47.4
News	35.5	44.1	30.1	46.6	39.1	30.9	40.6	42.3	20.3	47.4
Share	45.1	54.8	39.8	57.6	50.9	39.6	49.8	57.7	26.3	78.9
Influence	12.9	16.7	10.6	13.8	13.0	13.2	15.0	17.3	5.3	21.1
Improve	28.3	31.8	26.6	29.2	33.7	26.4	33.1	34.6	14.3	52.6
Other	2.9	4.7	1.6	6.0	3.0	1.6	3.8	0.0	0.8	5.3

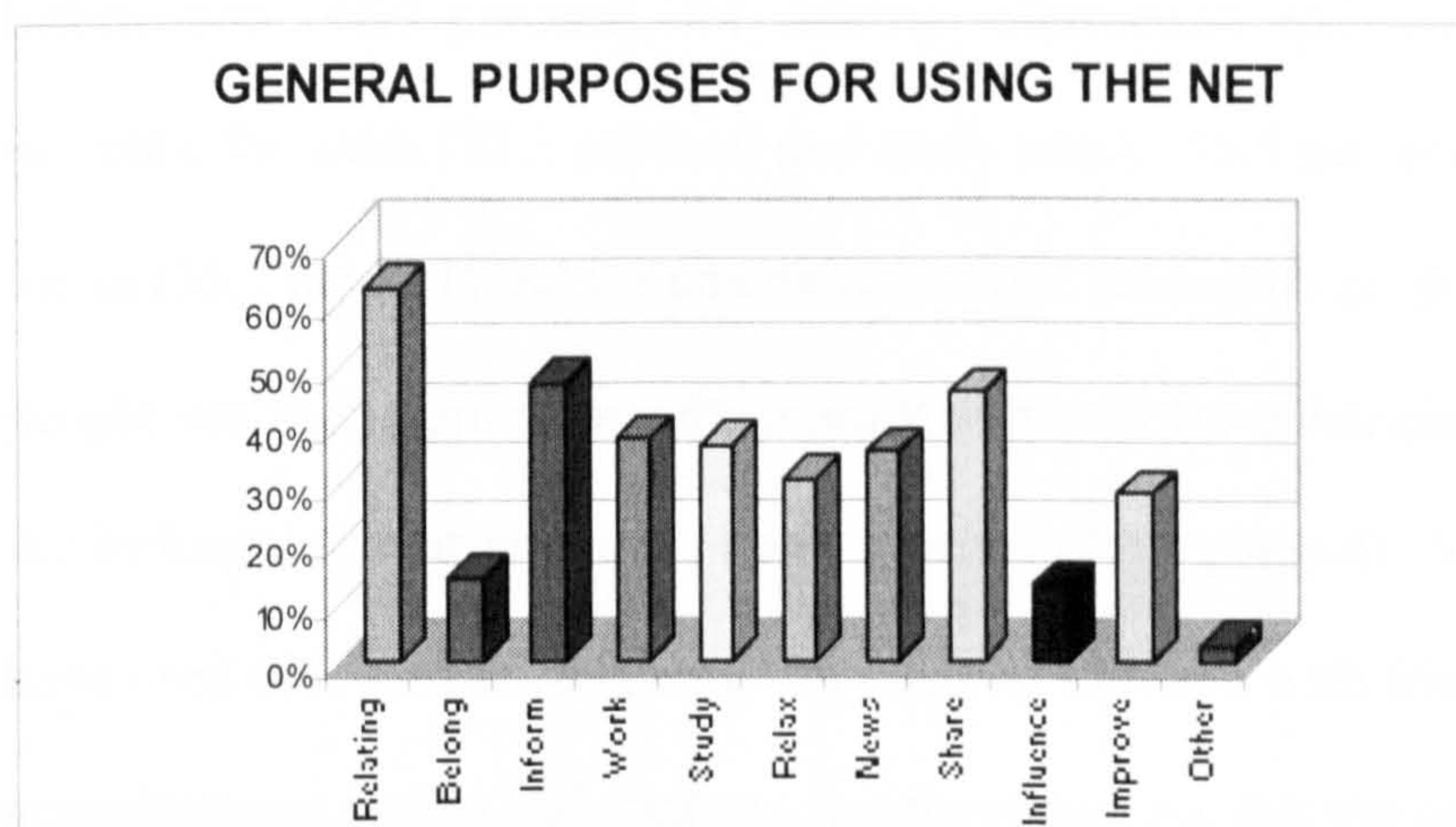


Chart 11. General purposes for using the Internet

Key

- 1 Relating to people/ keeping in touch
- 2 Belonging to a group
- 3 Getting specific information
- 4 For work purposes
- 5 For study purposes
- 6 For entertainment/relaxation
- 7 For obtaining news and views
- 8 For sharing information and messages
- 9 For influencing others/creating public opinion
- 10 For self improvement/for enhancing life

4.2.3. Possible general purposes for using the Internet

Respondents were asked to choose from ten possible general purposes and to indicate whether they themselves used the net for these particular purposes, or perceived other people using the net for these purposes. The following are the findings about net usage and are prioritized from the most to the least popular reasons. The choices are also examined in terms of sex, age and religious affiliation groups.

The most popular use of the Internet appears to be for keeping in touch and relating to others (62.3 percent), and is similar to Internet use in other parts of the world, confirming that people use the Internet mainly to maintain social contacts. The other uses of the Internet, in order of importance are: for purposes of getting specific information (46.9 percent), for sharing information and messages with others (45.1 percent), for work (37.3 percent) and study needs (36.5 percent), for obtaining news and views (35.5 percent) and for entertainment and relaxation purposes (30.9 percent). A few people use the Internet for self improvement and for enhancing life (28.3 percent), and for influencing and creating public opinion (12.9 percent). Surprisingly, though users have used the Internet frequently for keeping in touch with friends, colleagues and work acquaintances and casual contacts, yet they have not felt the need to belong to an online group (13.9 percent). Virtual groups do not as yet appear to be a popular choice.

Comparing Internet use between males and females, it appears that, for all possible purposes, males use the Internet more than females, confirming that there are more male users than female, and perhaps that males see more possibilities of integrating Internet usage with their regular needs. Comparing users from the three age groups, the youngest age group are the heaviest users of the Internet for practically all generic uses, with the

exception of using it for work purposes and self improvement. The middle age group (25-34 years) use the net more than their younger counterparts for these purposes.

Looking at the religious affiliation groups, the highest use of the Internet is made by seminarians and priests, for keeping in touch with people, for getting information, for sharing information with others, for study and work purposes, for personal improvement and for influencing others. It would appear that the seminarians are not only heavy users of the Internet, but also see possibilities of using the Internet for most of their personal and professional needs. They are also heavy users of the Internet for recreation and relaxation purposes, while the priests do not use the net so much for entertainment. Interestingly, the priests see the possibility of using the Internet to belong to online groups, while not many seminarians appear to be open to this need.

In comparison to the seminarians and priests, the laity uses the Internet to a lesser degree, but for practically the same purposes: keeping in touch, seeking information, news, sharing information, for work and study needs, for self improvement and for relaxation and entertainment purposes. Surprisingly, they do not see the need to use the Internet for influencing others, though some see the possibility of using the Internet to belong to online groups. Women Religious on the whole, are poor users of the Internet, and users among them use the net to a small degree for keeping in touch. There are more users interested in sharing information, rather than gathering information. A very small percentage uses the net for work, study and self improvement. They do not see the possibility of using the net for belonging to online groups, relaxing or influencing others.

Question 5 B Spiritual/Religious purposes for using the Internet

Table 12

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total	Sex		Age			Religious group			
		Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Uses										
Rel.News	28.3	35.1	24.5	20.8	34.9	30.1	27.5	59.6	18.8	52.6
Teachings	24.1	29.4	20.9	19.8	33.7	22.4	23.1	50.0	14.3	42.1
Messages	20.7	18.7	22.6	17.2	27.2	19.8	21.5	17.3	17.3	31.6
Prayers	14.0	9.7	17.2	11.8	15.4	14.5	15.8	9.6	9.0	10.5
Chain P.	11.7	8.0	14.8	17.3	11.2	10.3	15.0	1.9	7.5	5.3
Study	15.3	19.1	12.9	8.3	25.4	14.2	14.0	34.6	12.0	31.6
Reflection	11.3	15.4	8.7	3.6	14.2	14.0	9.0	36.5	7.5	52.6
Inspiration	18.0	19.7	17.4	16.1	24.9	17.2	16.3	23.1	17.3	42.1
Faith S.	15.9	14.7	17.2	13.0	25.4	13.5	15.4	15.4	12.8	36.8
Community	5.6	4.0	6.6	4.1	7.7	4.7	4.6	3.8	7.5	10.5
Other	1.2	1.3	1.2	2.9	1.2	0.5	1.7	1.9	0.0	0.0

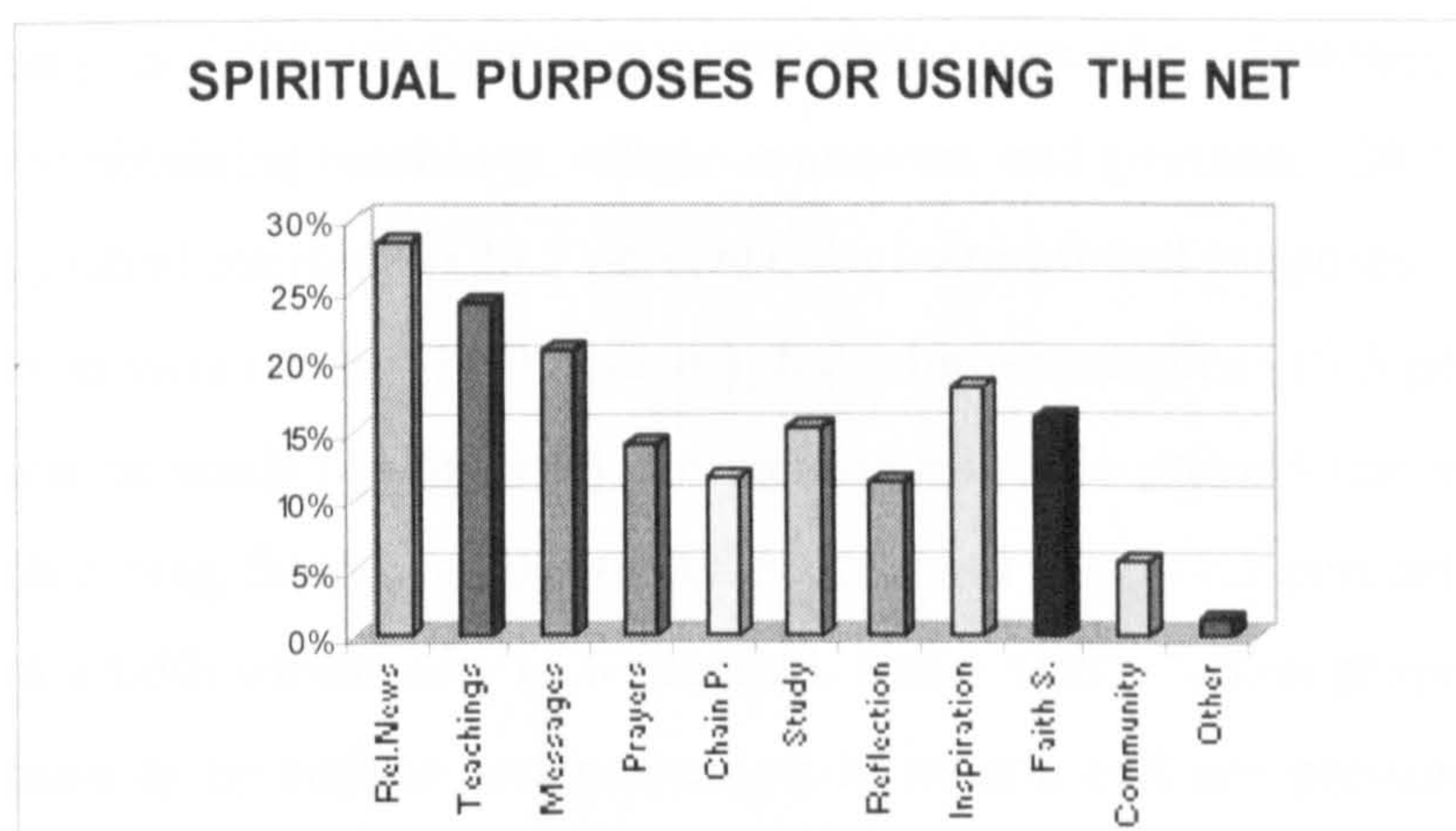


Chart 12. Religious purposes for using the Internet

Key

1. For getting religious news /information
2. For obtaining teachings/answers/guidance
3. For passing on spiritual messages
4. For intercession/prayer needs
5. For passing on chain prayers/messages
6. For study of religious books/messages
7. For Sunday readings/reflections/aids
8. For inspirational purposes
9. For sharing faith with others
10. For belonging to a faith community
11. For any other purposes

4.2.4. Possible religious purposes for using the Internet

When comparing the use of the Internet for spiritual or religious purposes with net usage for generic purposes, it becomes apparent that the net is not as popularly used for religious usage as for generic purposes. Whereas more than half of the net user respondents (63.2 percent), used the net for some generic purposes, when it came to religious usage, there were only a quarter of the net users (28.3 percent) that used it for some religious purposes. This could indicate that using the Internet for religious purposes is not the popular choice. Possible religious uses are explored in terms of popularity, as well as in relationship to sex, age and religious groupings

.

The most popular usage of the Internet for religious purposes was to obtain religious news and information; a little more than a quarter of the users (28.3 percent) stated that they used the net for this purpose. Other uses of the Internet, in terms of priority, were: for obtaining teachings, religious answers and guidance (24.1 percent), for the sharing of spiritual messages (20.7 percent), for inspirational purposes (18 percent), for sharing the faith with others (15.9 percent), for religious studies (15.3 percent), for intercession and prayer needs (14 percent), for passing on chain prayers and messages (11.7 percent), for obtaining Sunday readings, reflections and aids (11.3 percent), and, lastly, for belonging to a faith community (5.6 percent). Incidentally, 'chain prayers' are a set of prayers that have to be recited and passed on to others, and are presumed to be efficacious if the chain is unbroken.

Apart from about a fifth of the users who said they used the Internet for obtaining and sharing religious news, teachings and messages, other uses were not very popular. This could, perhaps, indicate that people perceived religious usage mainly in terms of religious understanding, rather than religious experience or expression. The fact that the use of the Internet to belong to a religious community, or online group, is least popular, could indicate either that people are not in favour of online membership, or that the idea has not yet caught on with religious users of the net.

Comparing the religious usage of the Internet between males and females we notice a significant difference. While more males preferred to use the Internet for obtaining religious news, teachings, Sunday readings, reflections, for the study of religious books, and for inspirational purposes, more females preferred to use the Internet to share spiritual messages, their faith experiences, prayer needs and chain prayers. Interestingly, females appeared to be more open to using the internet to belong to an online group than males.

While contrasting the religious usage of the Internet between the various age groups one immediately notices that, while young people were heaviest users of the Internet for generic purposes (62.3 percent), they used the Internet least (20.8 percent) for religious purposes. With the exception of using the Internet to circulate 'chain prayers', they used it least for all other possible religious uses. On the other hand, the middle-age group, (25-34 years) were consistently the highest users of the Internet for all possible religious uses. There were more middle age users open to the possibility of online religious groups than youth and senior users. Surprisingly, about a third of the seniors (30.1 percent) used the net for some religious needs.

Looking at religious affiliation, it was not surprising that priests and seminarians were seen to be the highest users of the net for religious purposes. Seminarians were the highest users of the net for obtaining religious aids, study materials and for sharing the faith. They were more open to online religious groups than all the other religious groupings. The laity's usage of the net for religious purposes, was not high, but a fair number of the laity used the net for their religious needs. However, they were not open to using the Internet to belong to religious online communities. Women Religious appear to use the net least for religious purposes as well as generic purposes, mainly because they were not regular users of the Internet and were consequently not aware of its potential religious possibilities.

Question 5 E Perception of clergy's net use for religious purposes

Table 13

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total	Age			Religious Affiliation			
		24&<	25-34	35>	Laity	Priests	WRelig	Sem.
	750	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Uses								
Rel.News	42%	45.4	50.3	38.3	34.4	65.4	62.4	78.9
Teachings	29%	33.4	37.3	24.3	24.2	36.5	45.1	52.6
Messages	31%	37.6	38.5	26.9	26.0	32.7	55.6	42.1
Prayers	20%	26.3	25.4	16.1	16.7	19.2	36.8	21.1
Chain P.	14%	22.1	18.3	9.8	10.2	7.7	29.3	26.3
Study	28%	35.1	36.1	21.6	23.5	26.9	44.4	36.8
Reflection	30%	38.8	34.3	24.8	24.6	40.4	42.1	73.7
Inspiration	21%	24.4	23.7	19.0	15.6	28.8	39.8	26.3
Faith S.	20%	22.8	23.7	18.2	16.0	7.7	41.4	42.1
Community	11%	13.1	15.4	8.4	8.3	9.6	23.3	21.1
Other	1%	1.9	0.0	0.8	1.0	0.0	1.5	0.0

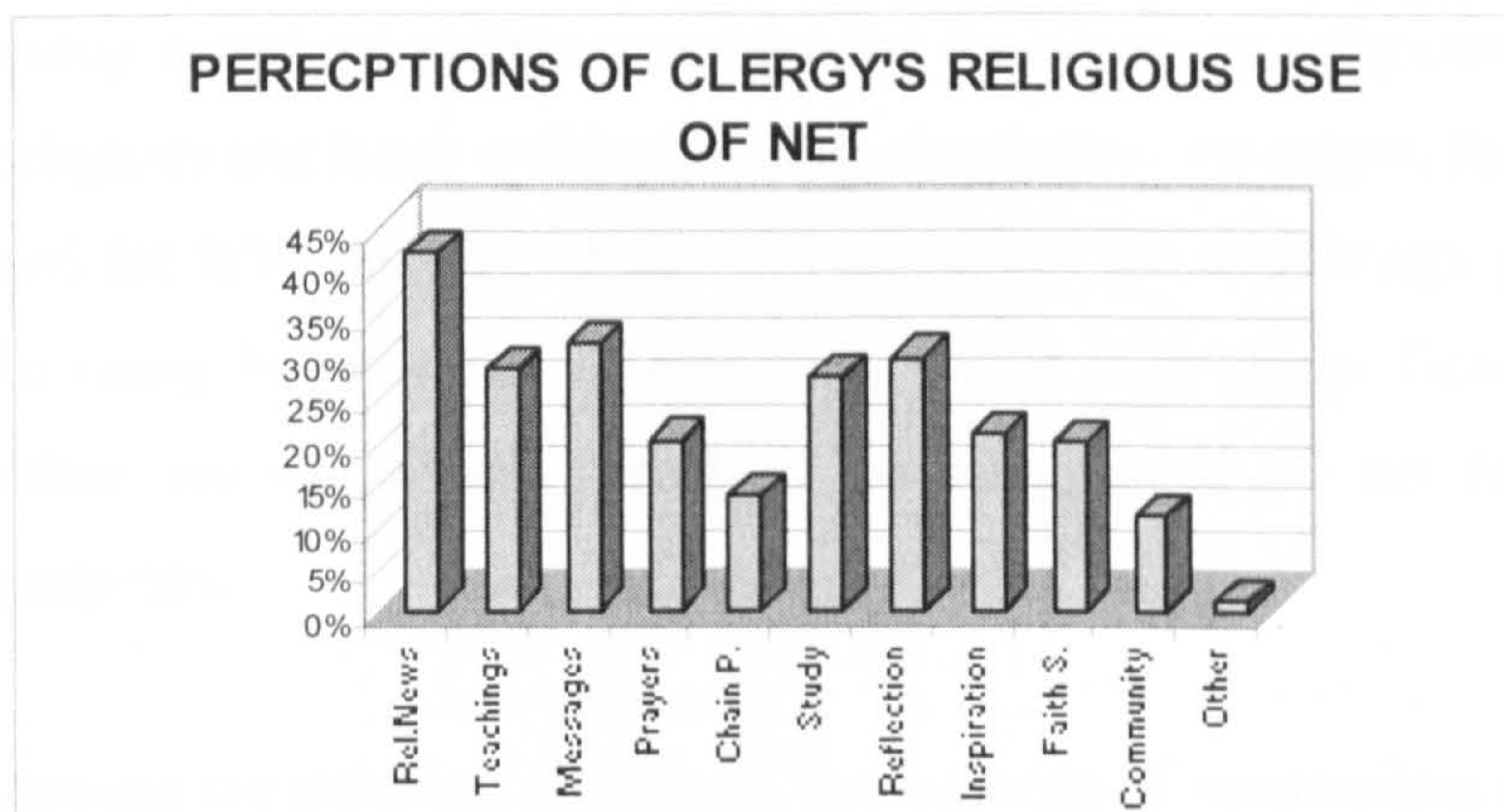


Chart 13. Perception of the Clergy's religious use the Internet

Key

- 1 For getting religious news /information
- 2 For obtaining teachings/answers/guidance
- 3 For passing on spiritual messages
- 4 For intercession/prayer needs
- 5 For passing on chain prayers/messages
- 6 For study of religious books/messages
- 7 For Sunday readings/reflections/aids
- 8 For inspirational purposes
- 9 For sharing faith with others
- 10 For belonging to a faith community

4.2.5.1 Perception of the clergy's net use for religious purposes

Respondents were asked to share their view of how they perceive the clergy use the Internet for religious purposes, and the following were their perceptions. About 42 percent of the respondents felt that the clergy use the net to obtain religious news and information, about a third believe the clergy use the net for passing on spiritual messages and obtaining spiritual aids. A little less than a third felt that the clergy used the net for obtaining teachings and spiritual answers (29 percent) and for studying religious books and messages (28 percent). About a fifth, were of the opinion that the clergy use the net for prayer needs, faith sharing and inspiration. Only a small percentage felt the clergy used the net for passing chain prayers or for belonging to an online faith community.

More young users perceived the clergy using the net for intercession and prayer needs, passing on chain prayers and for obtaining spiritual and liturgical aids. The middle age group perceived priests using the net for obtaining religious news and information, for religious teachings and for passing on spiritual messages, for study of religious sources and for faith sharing. About 15.5 percent of the middle age group felt that priests could be using the net for belonging to an online faith group. Fewer seniors than those in the other two age groups perceived the clergy used the net for all the above mentioned purposes.

Among the religious groupings, the majority of seminarians (over 70 percent) perceived the priests using the net for religious news and for obtaining spiritual aids. Fifty percent felt priests used the net for teachings, for sharing faith messages and for religious studies. A high percentage of women Religious also felt that priests used the net for religious information, for teachings, reflection, for inspiration, for faith sharing and for belonging to an online group. About a third of the laity felt that the clergy use the net for religious news, for teachings, for sharing messages, and a smaller number felt that the clergy used the net for prayer and faith sharing. A large number of priests perceived themselves and/or other priests using the net mainly for religious news, for reflection aids, for prayer and religious study. A few felt priests might belong to an online group.

Question 5 F Perception of the laity's use of the Internet for religion

Table 14

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total	Age			Religious Affiliation			
		24&<	25-34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem
	750	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Uses								
Rel.News	26%	26.9	25.4	27.4	27.5	30.8	25.6	42.1
Teachings	29%	23.8	34.9	29.3	25.6	28.8	44.4	57.9
Messages	28%	30.4	36.1	25.1	28.3	30.8	30.8	47.4
Prayers	29%	27.3	35.5	28.8	27.1	28.8	39.1	42.1
Chain P.	31%	34.5	37.9	27.4	29.8	28.8	39.8	36.8
Study	15%	13.1	25.4	12.1	14.2	15.4	22.6	26.3
Reflection	14%	12.5	16.6	13.7	13.8	17.3	17.3	26.3
Inspiration	23%	27.5	29.0	18.7	20.2	28.8	32.3	36.8
Faith S.	23%	19.0	33.1	19.8	21.7	19.2	34.6	26.3
Community	14%	12.5	19.5	12.7	11.9	15.4	26.3	21.1
Other	1%	1.1	0.0	1.1	1.3	0.0	0.8	0.0

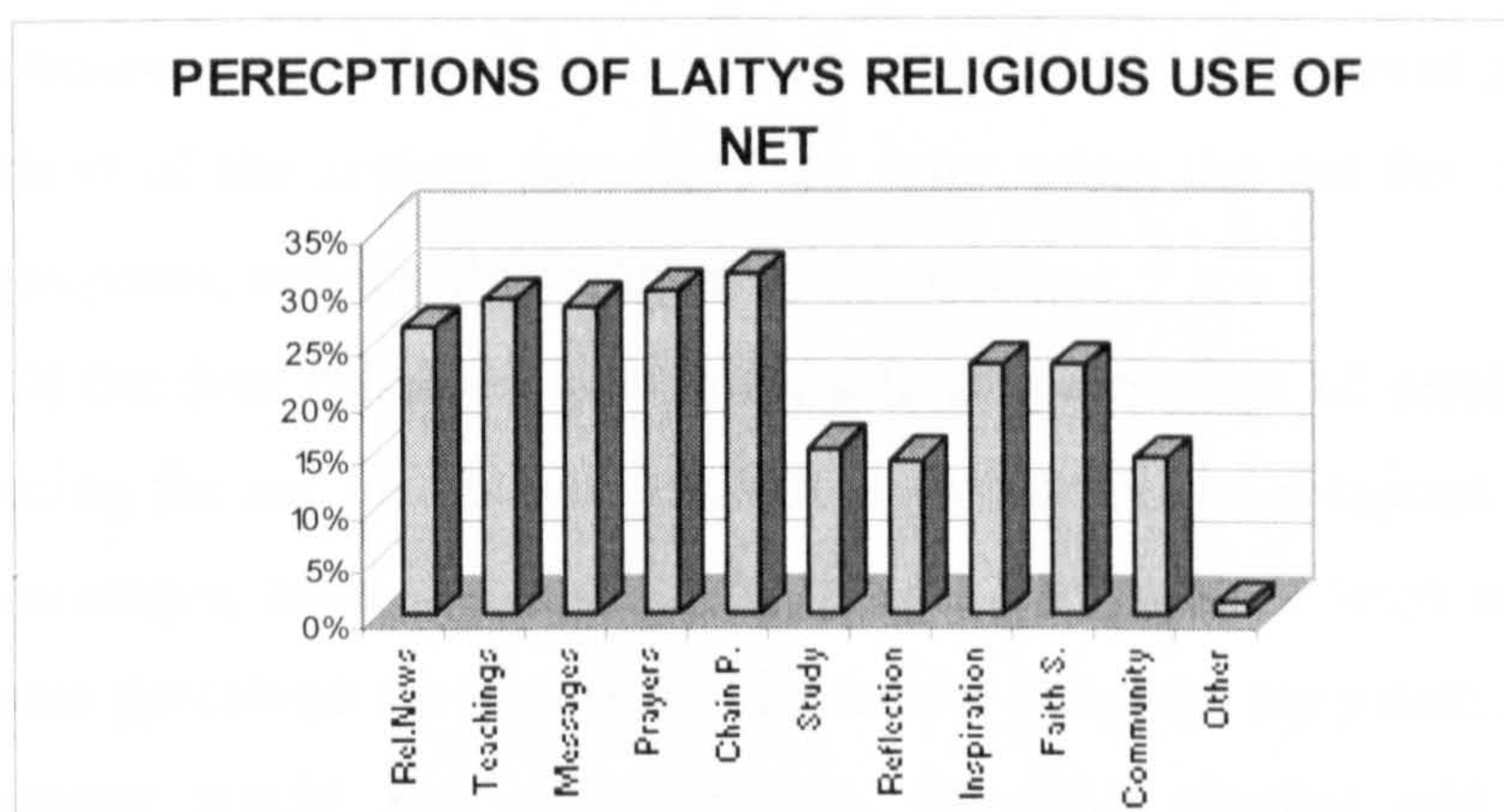


Chart 14. Perception of the laity's religious use the Internet

Key

- 1 For getting religious news /information
- 2 For obtaining teachings/answers/guidance
- 3 For passing on spiritual messages
- 4 For intercession/prayer needs
- 5 For passing on chain prayers/messages
- 6 For study of religious books/messages
- 7 For Sunday readings/reflections/aids
- 8 For inspirational purposes
- 9 For sharing faith with others
- 10 For belonging to a faith community

4.2.5.2 Perception of the laity's use of the net for religious purposes

While over 40 percent of respondents perceived the clergy using the net for religious purposes, only a third of respondents perceived the laity using the net for religion. The following were the perceptions of the religious usage of the net: for passing on chain prayers (31 percent); for obtaining teachings (29 percent); for passing spiritual messages (28 percent); for getting religious news (26 percent); for faith sharing and inspirational purposes (23 percent). A small percentage (14 percent), also felt that the laity used the net for getting spiritual aids and for belonging to an online faith group.

The middle age group had the highest number of respondents in all three groups who felt that the laity used the net less than the clergy for all the religious purposes listed. About a third of this group were of the opinion that the laity used the net for obtaining religious teachings, for prayer needs, for passing on chain prayers, and for faith sharing. A third of the youth perceived the laity using the net for passing on chain prayers and for obtaining religious news, teachings, prayer and inspirational purposes. A little less than a third of the seniors perceived the laity using the net for obtaining teachings, prayer purposes, and for obtaining religious news.

Of the four religious groupings, a large percentage of seminarians perceived the laity using the net for obtaining religious teachings and religious news, for sharing religious messages, faith sharing and for prayer purposes. A large number of women religious also perceived the laity using the net for religious purposes: for obtaining teachings, for prayer needs and chain prayers, for faith sharing and for inspiration purposes. Surprisingly, about a quarter of women Religious (26.3 percent) perceived the laity using the net to belong to an online faith group. Almost a third of the priests perceived the laity using the net for obtaining religious news and for sharing spiritual messages, for prayer needs and for the passing of chain prayers and inspirational purposes. About a third of the laity perceived themselves, and/or other laity, using the net predominantly for the passing of chain prayers, and spiritual messages, for obtaining religious news and teachings, for prayer and inspirational purposes. Only a tenth of the laity perceived the net being used by the laity for belonging to an online faith group.

Question 6 Why people use the net in preference to traditional religious sources

Table 15

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex			Age			Religious Affiliation			
	Total	Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Ease of Use	53.1	57.9	52.0	58.0	58.6	52.2	55.0	69.2	44.4	63.2
Userfriendly	36.0	38.5	35.1	44.9	40.8	31.4	38.5	30.8	27.1	36.8
Life style	16.1	16.4	16.5	17.9	11.2	18.2	17.5	5.8	21.1	5.3
Pace of life	25.7	25.8	26.6	22.6	29.0	26.9	21.9	34.6	41.4	26.3
Control	19.9	19.7	20.5	20.3	22.5	19.3	21.9	9.6	18.8	5.3
EasyAccess	34.5	35.1	34.6	26.8	40.8	36.1	33.8	30.8	44.4	26.3
Any Other	3.3	3.0	3.5	5.4	3.0	2.4	4.6	0.0	1.5	0.0

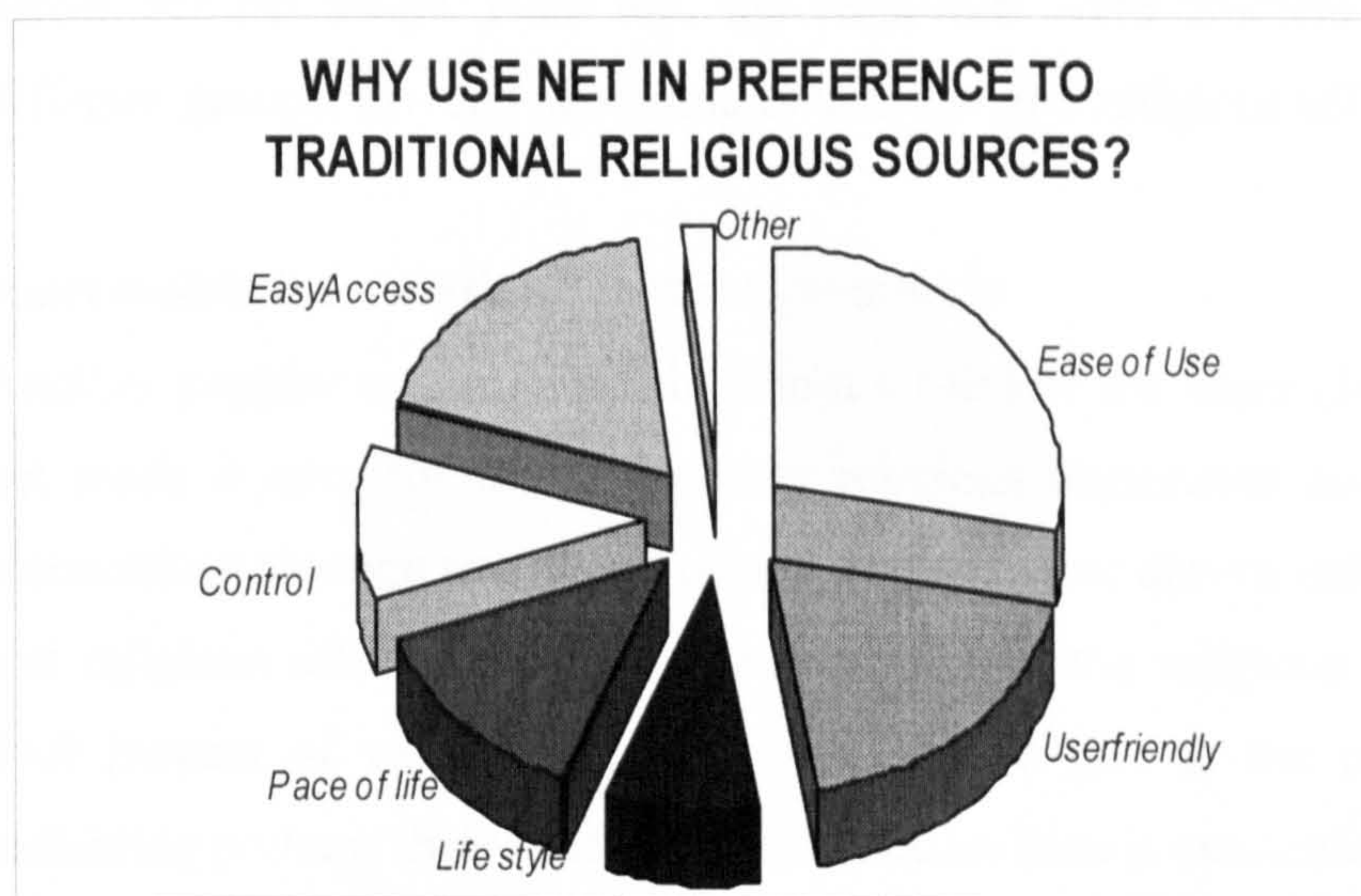


Chart 15. Why the net is/may be used in preference to traditional religious sources

Key

1. Ease of Use
2. Its user-friendly nature
3. In keeping with my work and life style
4. Pace of life/time constraints
5. Within my control
6. Inaccessible information/resources available
7. Any other

4.2.6. Why the net is preferred to traditional sources of religion

Ease of access

The first reason why the net is used or would be used, for religious purposes when traditional sources are available is because the net is relatively easy to use. Over half the respondents (53.1 percent), gave this as their main reason for preference, and it was constant across all possible variables, i.e., male and female, different age groups and different religious affiliation groups.

The net is user-friendly

The second reason for preference for the net, was that the net was user-friendly, a reason similar to the first, and about a third of the users (36 percent), gave this as their second reason for net usage. Here too, the responses were uniform and constant across the different groups, divided according to sex, age and religious affiliation.

Inaccessible information/resources available

Another popular reason, given by about a third of the users (34.5 percent), was that the net made it easy for users to access religious documents and resources, which were inaccessible through traditional means. Results were almost uniform across the sex, ages and religious affiliation groups. Interestingly, in the religious affiliation groups, it was 44.4 percent of women Religious who shared this as the reason for using the net, indicating perhaps their need for greater access than is available to them than at present.

Pace of life and time constraints

The fourth most popular reason, advanced by a quarter of the users (25.7 percent), was that the net was in keeping with the pace of life, and with time constraints experienced by net users. Though this reason was not as popular as the other three, mentioned above, there was again uniformity across the sex, age and religious affiliation groups.

Within my control

The fifth reason, offered by about a fifth of the users (19.9 percent), was that the net was within the users' control. Here too, there was similarity in the number of users, averaging about 20 percent across the groups, except with the priests and seminarians.

In keeping with my work and lifestyle

The least popular reason, mentioned by about 16 percent of the users, was that the net fitted in with the respondent's life style.

Question 7 What religious content do people expect from the Internet?

Table 16

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total 750	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			
		Males 299	Female 425	24< 167	25/34 169	35> 379	Laity 480	Priests 52	W.Relig 133	Sem. 19
Rel. News	52.0	54.2	51.8	51.0	55.0	53.8	52.5	55.8	56.4	42.1
Teachings	44.5	47.2	43.8	29.7	49.1	50.4	46.5	50.0	42.9	36.8
Homily Aids	30.8	36.5	27.5	14.1	36.7	35.6	25.0	73.1	33.8	84.2
Testimonies	36.0	31.1	40.9	48.7	33.1	33.8	39.8	15.4	36.1	10.5
Studies	36.7	38.8	36.2	22.1	45.0	41.2	34.8	32.7	49.6	57.9
Meditation	36.8	30.4	42.1	32.1	30.2	42.7	35.2	34.6	51.1	15.8
Approval	15.9	16.1	15.8	12.5	17.8	16.9	16.5	7.7	17.3	21.1
Other	2.8	2.3	3.1	4.8	1.8	2.4	2.9	1.9	2.3	0.0

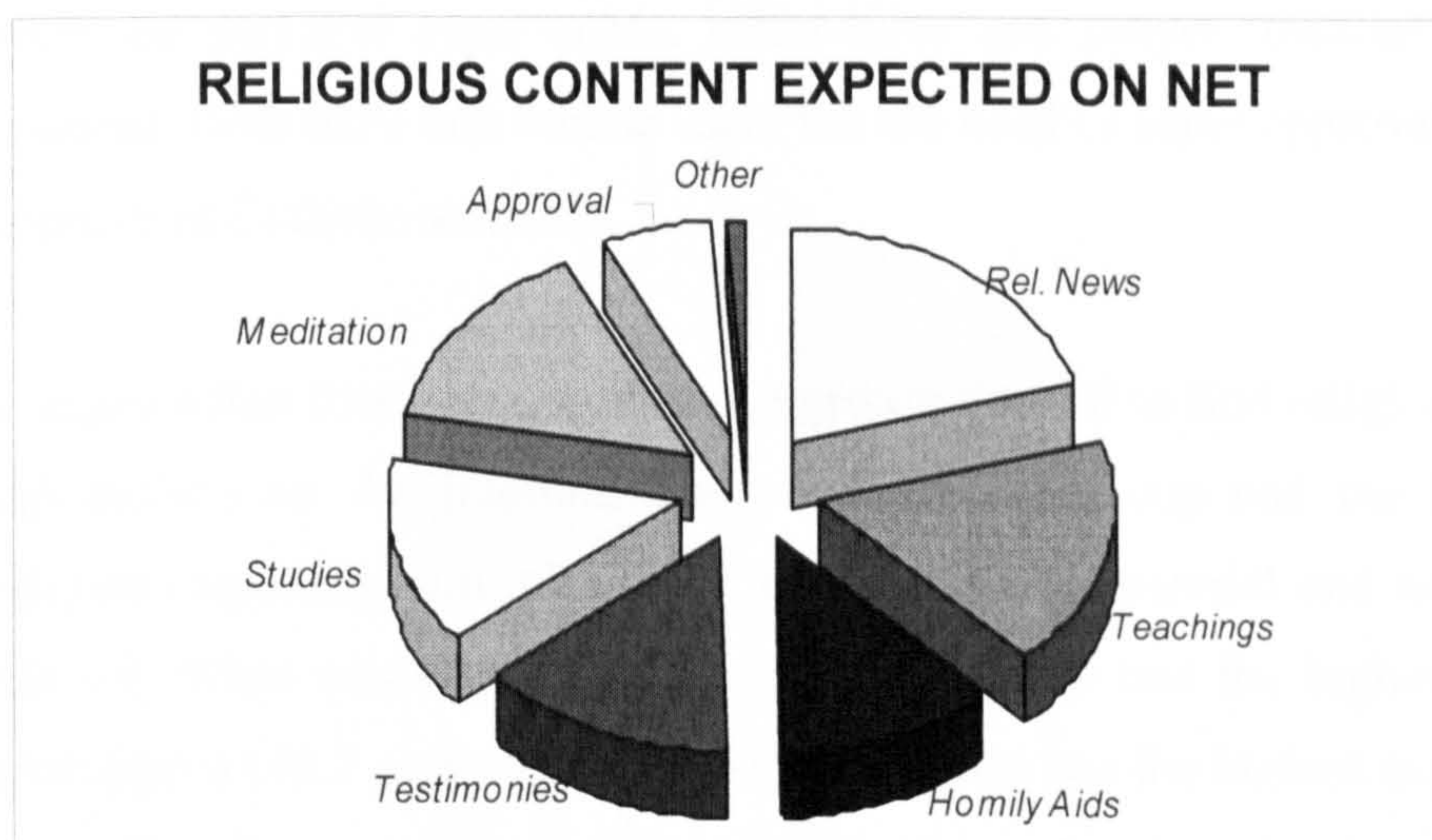


Chart 16. Religious content expected on the net

Key:

1. Religious news/information
2. Religious Teachings/Doctrine
3. Homily/Liturgical aids
4. Personal Experiences/Testimonies
5. Study Material/Courses on religious matters
6. Online Prayer/meditation/inspiration
7. Some kind of approval ratings for genuine religious websites
8. Any other

4.2.7. Content expected on religious websites

Religious news and information was the most popular choice by more than half the net users (52 percent). The second expectation, with a little less than half of the respondents (44.5 percent), was to have religious teachings and doctrine on the net. The other expectations, shared by a third of the users, were: accessing aids for online prayer, meditation and inspiration (36.8 percent); having study materials and courses on religious matters (36.7 percent); obtaining personal experiences and testimonies (36 percent); and finding homilies and liturgical aids (30.8 percent). Significantly, only 15.9 percent of users expected some kind of an approval system to regulate authentic Catholic sites on the Internet.

Male users were open to, and had expectations of, religious news and information, teachings, liturgical aids, and study materials on the net, while more female users preferred personal experiences, testimonies and prayer, meditation and inspirational material. Both male and female users felt the need of some approval system on the net to approve of Catholic websites.

It appears that fifty percent of all age groups desired to find religious news and religious information on the Internet. The youngest age group had the least expectations of religious teachings, liturgical aids, religious study material and an approval system on the net. What was significant was that this group had the highest desire for personal testimonies (48.7 percent). The 24-35 age group had the highest expectation of liturgical and religious study aids on the net, while the seniors had the greatest need for doctrinal and inspirational materials on the net.

In the religious affiliation groups, the highest expectation for teachings and doctrine came from the priests and the laity. Seminarians had the highest expectations for resource materials for religious studies online. Significantly, more of the laity expected personal testimonies and experiences, than priests and seminarians, and the priests had the least expectation of an approval system for approval of genuine Catholic websites.

Question 8. Types of presentation people expect from religious websites

Table 17

Qualitative Analysis

Group	Total 750	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			
		Males 299	Female 425	24&< 167	25/34 169	35> 379	Laity 480	Priests 52	W.Relig 133	Sem. 19
Appealing	47.1	49.2	47.5	57.8	46.7	44.9	46.7	53.8	53.4	52.6
Blend	25.5	24.4	27.1	28.1	28.4	24.3	27.1	15.4	27.8	15.8
Ease	30.7	34.8	29.2	32.7	41.4	27.4	34.4	28.8	26.3	36.8
Popular	28.4	29.8	28.5	37.1	29.0	26.1	30.6	23.1	27.8	5.3
Relating	68.5	68.2	70.8	62.4	69.2	73.1	69.0	71.2	72.9	84.2
Other	2.4	2.7	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.3	0.0	3.8	5.3

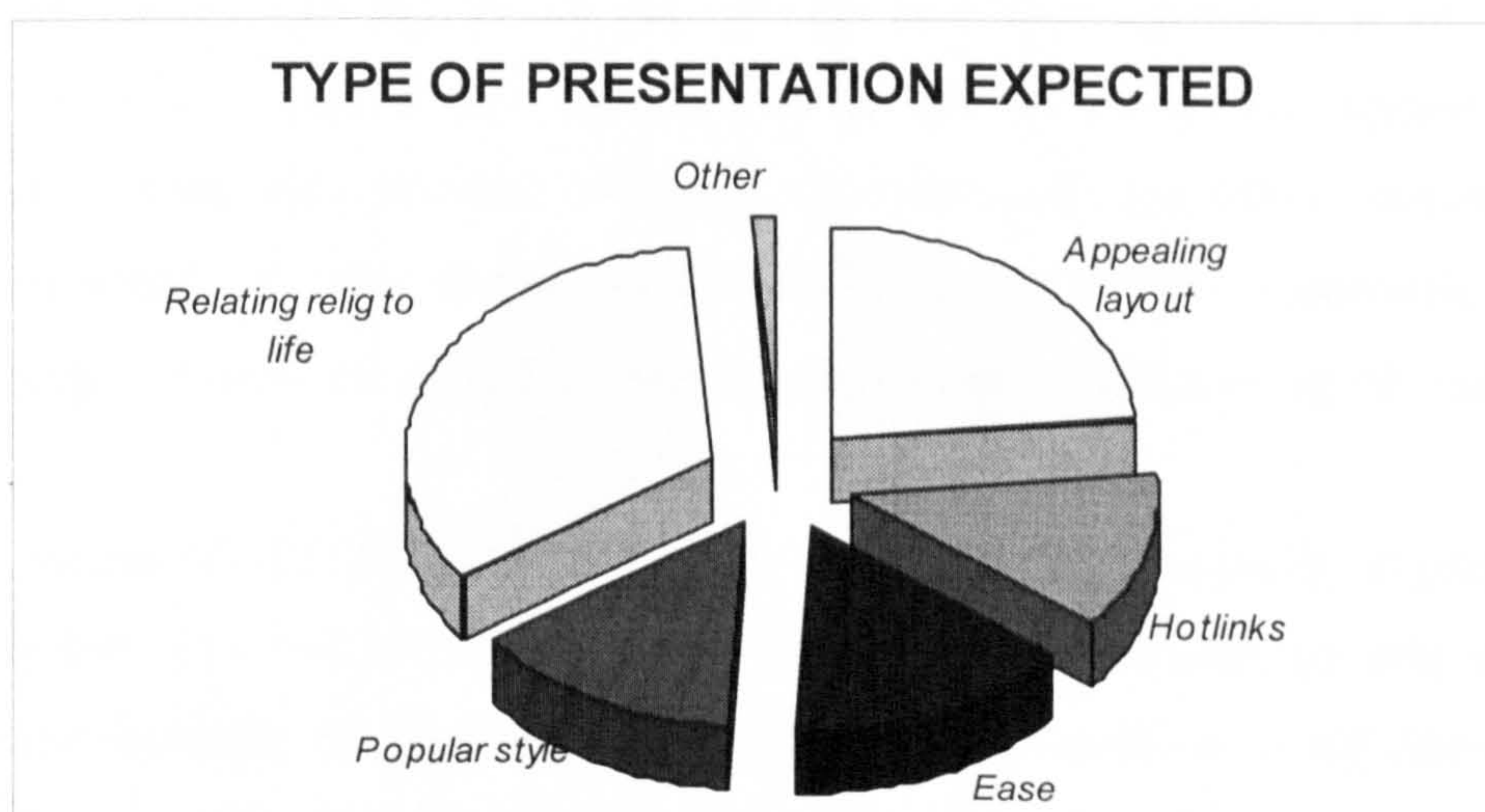


Chart 17 Types of presentation expected on the net

Key:

1. Appealing, attractive and creative: colour/layout/visuals
2. Blend of texts and visuals/ hotlinks
3. Ease of movement through different pages/links
4. Popular style, readable, in non-religious jargon
5. Relating religious matters to current situations and daily life
6. Any Other

4.2.8. Types of presentation expected from religious websites

The respondents who wanted to see religious websites relating to current situations and daily life constituted a majority, 68.5 percent. A little less than half of the respondents (47.1percent), wanted websites to be attractively presented, and about a third of the respondents (30.7 percent), wished that there could be ease of movement on religious sites. Less than a third of the respondents (28.4 percent) wanted websites to be constructed in a popular, readable style, with no religious jargon, and about a quarter of the respondents (25.5 percent), wanted to see a mix of text and visuals in the religious website layout.

Female users had greater expectations than males of websites relating religious matters to daily life situations, and of the blending of texts with visuals in their presentations. A very large majority of all age groups had high expectations of religious websites relevance to current happenings, with the seniors having the highest expectations. All age groups also expected religious websites to be appealing, attractive and creatively presented. A large section of the 25-34 age group (41.4 percent), felt strongly that religious websites should have ease of movement when surfing through them.

Among all the religious affiliation groups, a large majority expressed the need for websites to link religious matters with current life situations, and this was expressed most strongly by the seminarians. About fifty percent of all religious groups expressed the desire for religious websites to be appealing, attractive and creative. About a third of the laity and seminarians, and about a quarter of priests and women Religious, expected that religious web sites should have ease of movement and smooth linkage with relevant sites. A third of the laity, a quarter of priests and women Religious, but only a small fraction of the seminarians, expected religious websites to be presented in a popular readable style free of religious jargon.

The common expectation of all net users, irrespective of sex, age or religious affiliation, appears to be the need for religious websites to be contextualized in current happenings and events, namely that religion on the net would be related to life.

Question 9 Web characteristics desired as part of religious websites

Table 18

Qualitative Analysis

Group	Total	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			
		Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	iSem.
	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Interactive	52.1	55.5	51.3	51.4	56.2	54.4	54.6	55.8	48.1	63.2
Feedback	53.1	59.5	50.4	61.7	56.8	48.5	55.8	51.9	45.1	57.9
Forum	29.5	31.4	28.9	36.6	29.0	27.7	31.3	17.3	30.8	15.8
Other										

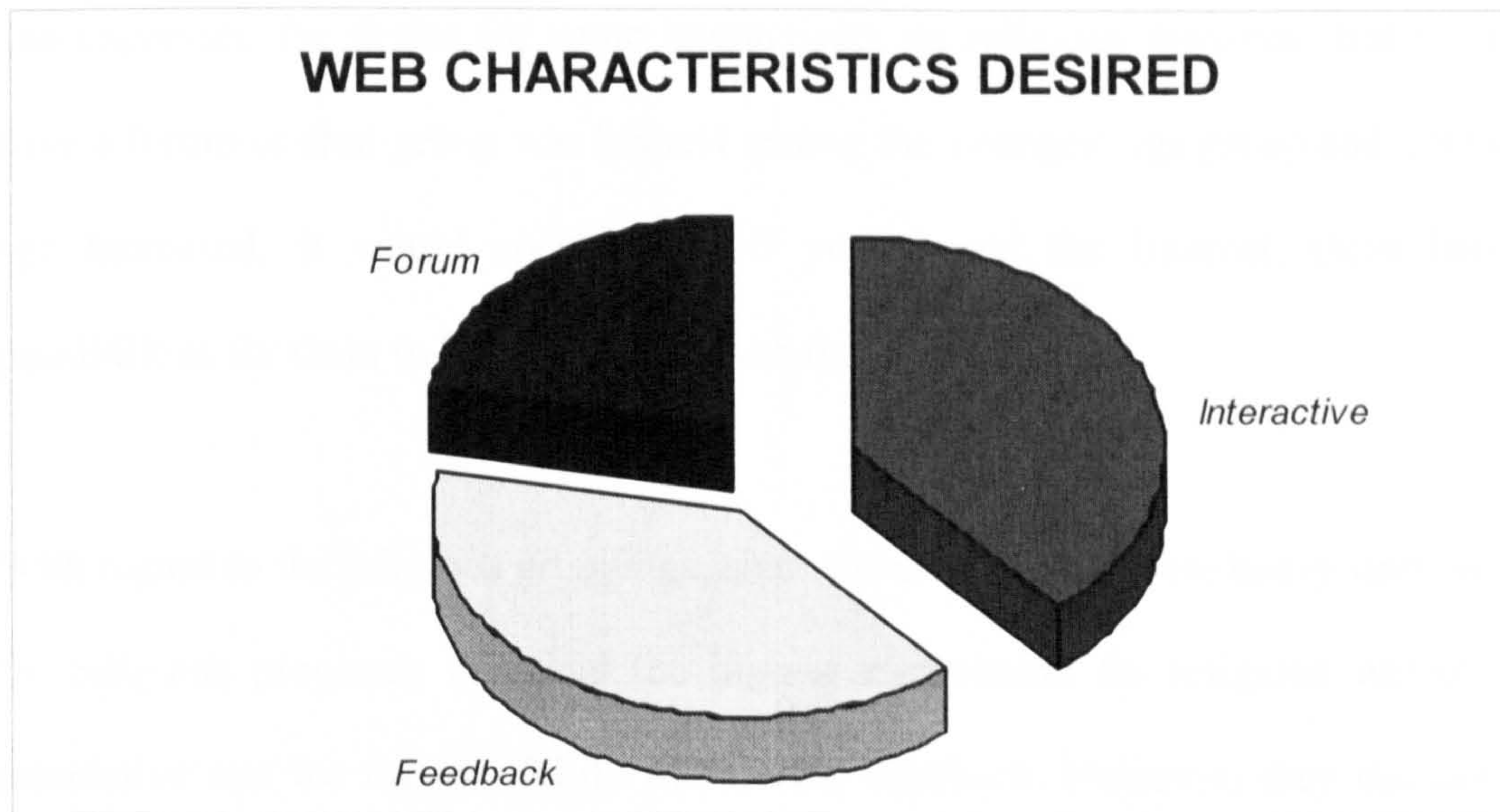


Chart 18. Web characteristics desired by users

Key:

1. Possibility of interactivity
2. Space for feedback/ Public opinion
3. Forums/Chat groups

4.2.9. Web characteristics desired on religious websites

In response to the question about the web characteristics of religious websites, about half of the respondents (53.1 percent) wanted space for offering feedback and for creating public opinion on religious websites. Similarly, half of the respondents (52.1 percent), expected some possibility of interactivity on religious websites. A little less than a third of the respondents (29.5 percent), expressed the need for a forum or chat group. There was a greater number of males who had this expectation than females.

Among the three age groups, about fifty percent of users felt the need to offer feedback, and expressed the desire for some interactivity on religious websites. But the need to have a forum or chat-group was highest among the youngest age group and decreased as age increased. It would appear that, if youth used the Internet, there had to be possibilities for them to be active and make their presence felt.

With regard to the religious groupings, since the seminarians were heavy users of the net for religious purposes, they had the highest expectation for religious websites to be interactive and for the possibility of offering feedback. However, they did not expect religious websites to have forums or chat-groups. About half of the priests also felt there should be space for feedback and public opinion, and for interactivity on religious websites. While fifty percent of the laity felt religious websites should be interactive and offer space for feedback and for the voicing of public opinion, about a third desired forums and chat-groups on religious websites. To a lesser extent, women religious also desired these web characteristics.

Question 10 Reasons for poor usage of the net for religious purposes

Table 19

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			
		Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Not aware	56.3	58.9	56.5	64.7	53.3	56.7	58.3	61.5	52.6	63.2
ActualWeb	51.6	53.8	52.0	55.8	51.5	52.8	55.8	53.8	45.9	36.8
Location	22.7	23.4	23.3	27.6	24.9	21.6	22.9	19.2	24.8	31.6
No Promo	44.1	49.5	41.9	35.1	52.1	47.0	43.8	53.8	50.4	47.4
Finance	24.8	25.1	24.9	17.3	23.1	29.3	22.7	25.0	35.3	26.3
Facilities	18.9	17.4	20.7	8.9	25.4	21.1	15.8	15.4	36.8	26.3
Traditions	27.7	27.1	29.9	32.8	29.6	26.9	27.1	28.8	33.1	42.1
Publicity	38.8	42.8	37.4	42.4	40.8	38.5	43.1	50.0	30.8	31.6
Other	3.6	5.0	2.8	3.6	4.1	3.4	4.6	3.8	1.5	0.0

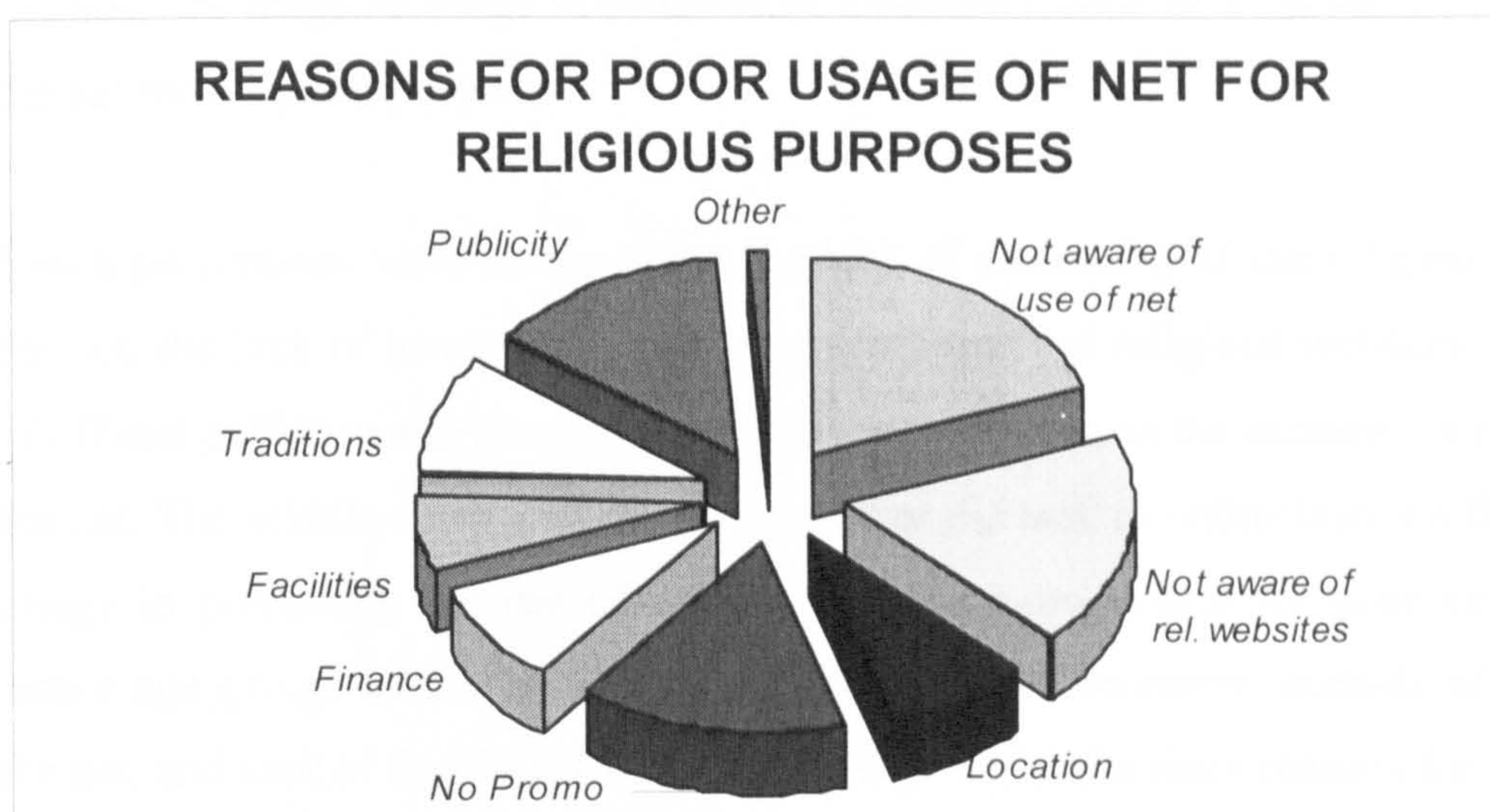


Chart 19. Reasons for poor usage of the net for religious purposes

Key:

1. Lack of awareness of its possible uses on the net
2. Lack of awareness of actual religious websites
3. Lack of awareness of their location on the net
4. Lack of enthusiasm on the part of the clergy to promote religious websites
5. Financial and economic constraints in using the net for religious purposes
6. Lack of facilities/possibilities for religious usage in office/work situation
7. Traditional religious practices and habits
8. Lack of official publicity and promotion of the web for religious purposes
9. Any other

4.2.10. Reasons for poor usage of the net for religious purposes

Over half of the respondents (56.3 percent), felt that the main reasons for the poor usage of the net for religious purposes was lack of awareness of the net's potential for religious use and lack of awareness of the existence of religious websites. About 44.1 percent of users blamed the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the clergy, to promote religious websites, for the net not being used well for religious purposes. A little more than a third of the respondents (38.8 percent) felt that another reason for the poor usage of the net was lack of publicity and promotion. Over a quarter of the respondents felt that other reasons were: traditional religious practices and financial and economic constraints. About a fifth of the respondents felt a lack of awareness of their location on the net was another reason for poor usage. Lastly, about a fifth of respondents felt that the lack of facilities for religious usage in office/work situations could be a reason for poor usage of the net for religious purposes.

Youth perceptions were strong about the lack of awareness of the religious potential of the net, the lack of awareness of the actual presence of religious websites, and the lack of official publicity and promotion of religious websites, as the reasons for poor usage of the net. The middle age group felt strongly that the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the clergy in promoting the use of the net was the main reason for poor net usage. The senior age group, meanwhile perceived financial and economic considerations in using the net, and lack of facilities for religious usage, to be the main reasons for low usage of the net. They also blamed the clergy for the poor promotion of the net for religious use.

Half the priests, seminarians, laity, and women Religious felt that lack of awareness of the net's religious potential, and lack of awareness of actual religious websites, were the main causes for low net use. The laity, women Religious, priests and seminarians felt that other possible reasons were the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the clergy in promoting the net, and lack of official publicity for web pages. Interestingly, a third of the women Religious proposed financial considerations, lack of proper facilities, and traditional religious practices, as the causes for poor net usage.

Question 11 The difference the net could make if well used

Table 20

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total 750	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			Sem. 19
		Males 299	Female 425	24&< 167	25/34 169	35> 379	Laity 480	Priests 52	W.Relig 133	
Interest	44.8	47.8	44.9	47.8	47.9	44.9	46.7	48.1	39.1	63.2
Connected	55.7	54.2	59.1	58.8	52.7	58.6	57.1	57.7	55.6	68.4
Participate	29.5	28.4	30.4	27.6	30.8	30.1	32.3	21.2	27.1	26.3
Central	27.1	24.7	30.4	21.5	24.3	33.0	27.9	28.8	32.3	36.8
Expression	42.1	51.8	36.5	48.4	42.6	41.4	46.0	51.9	27.1	63.2
Opportunity	28.0	31.1	27.1	20.9	26.0	32.5	26.9	30.8	32.3	52.6
Competence	43.7	44.8	44.9	35.3	50.3	47.2	47.1	50.0	39.8	52.6
Youth Int.	42.4	39.1	45.6	50.4	46.2	38.3	45.0	26.9	42.1	42.1
Equality	18.4	19.1	18.4	20.5	16.6	18.5	20.2	7.7	19.5	15.8
No diff.	5.3	6.4	4.7	7.9	1.8	5.8	5.8	1.9	6.8	0.0
Other	1.3	2.0	0.9	2.3	1.2	1.1	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0

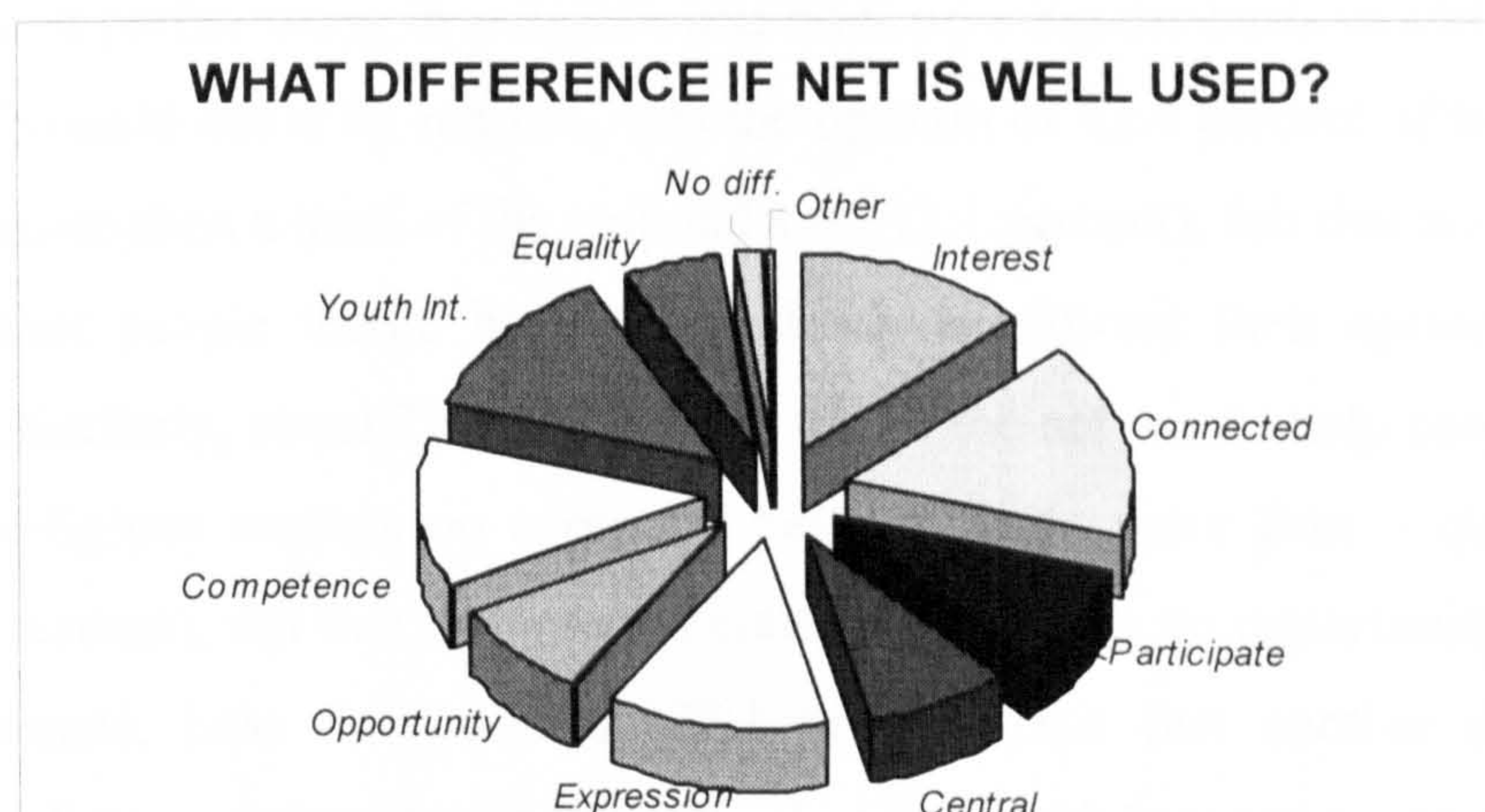


Chart 20. What difference would it make if the net were well used for religion
Key

1. Greater interest in spiritual matters
2. Religion would be more related and connected with life and daily realities
3. People would participate in religion and religious matters on a regular basis
4. Religion, instead of being peripheral, would be more central to people's lives
5. People would have a possibility to express their opinion in religious matters
6. More people would have the opportunity to satisfy their religious needs
7. Lay people would be more competent and well versed in religious matters
8. Youth would participate in religious activities on a regular basis
9. Use of the internet would promote equal opportunities for all
10. Use of the Internet for religious purposes would not make any difference

4.2.11. The difference the net could bring about if used for religion

When participants were asked whether the usage of the net for religious purposes would bring about any difference, most respondents were hopeful and positive. They foresaw the differences the net could bring to their lives and in the practice of religion. From the responses, one could detect an expectation of their hopes being realized, and their concerns being addressed, by usage of the Internet for religion.

A little more than half the respondents (55.7 percent), felt that one result the use of the net could bring about would be that religion would be more related to, and connected with, life and daily realities. About 44.8 percent felt that another difference the use of the net could bring, would be a greater interest in spiritual matters. A little less than half the respondents (43.7 percent), felt that another difference could be that lay people would be more competent and well versed in religious matters. Youth being interested and participating in religious activities on a regular basis would be yet another difference brought about by net use, was the opinion of 42.4 percent of the respondents. Likewise, more than a third of the respondents (42.1 percent), felt that another difference would be that people would have a possibility to express their opinions on religious matters. Similarly, about 29.5 percent felt use of the net would help people to participate more in religious matters on a regular basis. A little more than a quarter of respondents (28 percent), felt that the Internet could offer people an opportunity to satisfy their religious needs. Less than a third (27.1 percent), felt that another difference would be that religion, rather than being peripheral, would become more central to people's lives. However, a small fraction of the respondents (5.3 percent), felt that use of the Internet for religious purposes would not make any difference at all.

In contrasting the opinions of males and females, there were more males who thought that net use would result in greater interest in religious matters, people would have the opportunities to express their opinions on religious matters and satisfy their spiritual needs. On the other hand, there were more female users who felt that the key differences would be that religion would be connected to life, people, and youth in particular, would

participate more in religious matters on a regular basis and religion would be more central to life.

All three age groups were of the opinion that the result of using the Internet for religion would be that religion would be more connected to life. The youth respondents felt that other results would be greater interest in spiritual matters and, as a result, people would feel more competent and well versed in religious matters, and youth would participate more in religious activities. The middle age group (24 -35 years), besides endorsing the above opinions, added that the use of the net for religion would give people the possibility to express their opinions in religious matters. The senior group foresaw religion becoming more central to life as a possible outcome of net use for religious purposes.

In the religious affiliation groups, all four groups were in agreement that the most likely result of net use would be that religion would be more connected to life. It was also the opinion of all four religious groups, that there would be a greater interest in spiritual matters resulting from net usage for religion. A large number of seminarians and priests felt that another possible outcome of Internet use could be that people would have the possibility to express their opinion in religious matters as they felt more competent in them. However, not many priests felt that youth would participate more in religious matters because of Internet usage. The laity were also of the opinion that with the use of the Internet for religious purposes, religion rather than being peripheral, would become more central to peoples lives. The laity and women Religious were the only groups who felt that the use of the Internet would provide equal opportunities for all. The women Religious mostly endorsed the reasons offered by the other groups, though not in large numbers. However, some members of the women Religious group were of the opinion that the use of the Internet would not make any difference at all to faith or life.

Question 12 Ways in which the net could be a threat to existing religious practices

Table 21

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total 750	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			
		Males 299	Female 425	24&< 167	25&34 169	35> 379	Laity 480	Priests 52	W.Relig 133	Sem. 19
Substitute	38.3	38.5	39.1	47.3	40.8	34.6	38.3	36.5	36.1	42.1
Challenge	35.3	37.1	35.3	34.7	39.1	35.1	36.5	38.5	36.8	52.6
Dwindle	15.3	15.4	15.3	11.3	18.9	15.6	15.2	9.6	18.0	15.8
Astray	20.4	23.4	18.4	23.4	26.0	17.4	21.3	21.2	17.3	26.3
Divide	16.9	18.1	16.7	14.3	15.4	19.3	17.3	17.3	15.8	15.8
Elite tool	19.5	19.1	20.7	12.0	20.1	24.0	17.1	30.8	27.8	21.1
Confusion	37.3	42.1	35.1	47.3	36.7	35.4	41.3	48.1	21.1	47.4
Other	2.9	4.3	1.9	4.2	2.4	2.1	3.8	0.0	0.8	0.0

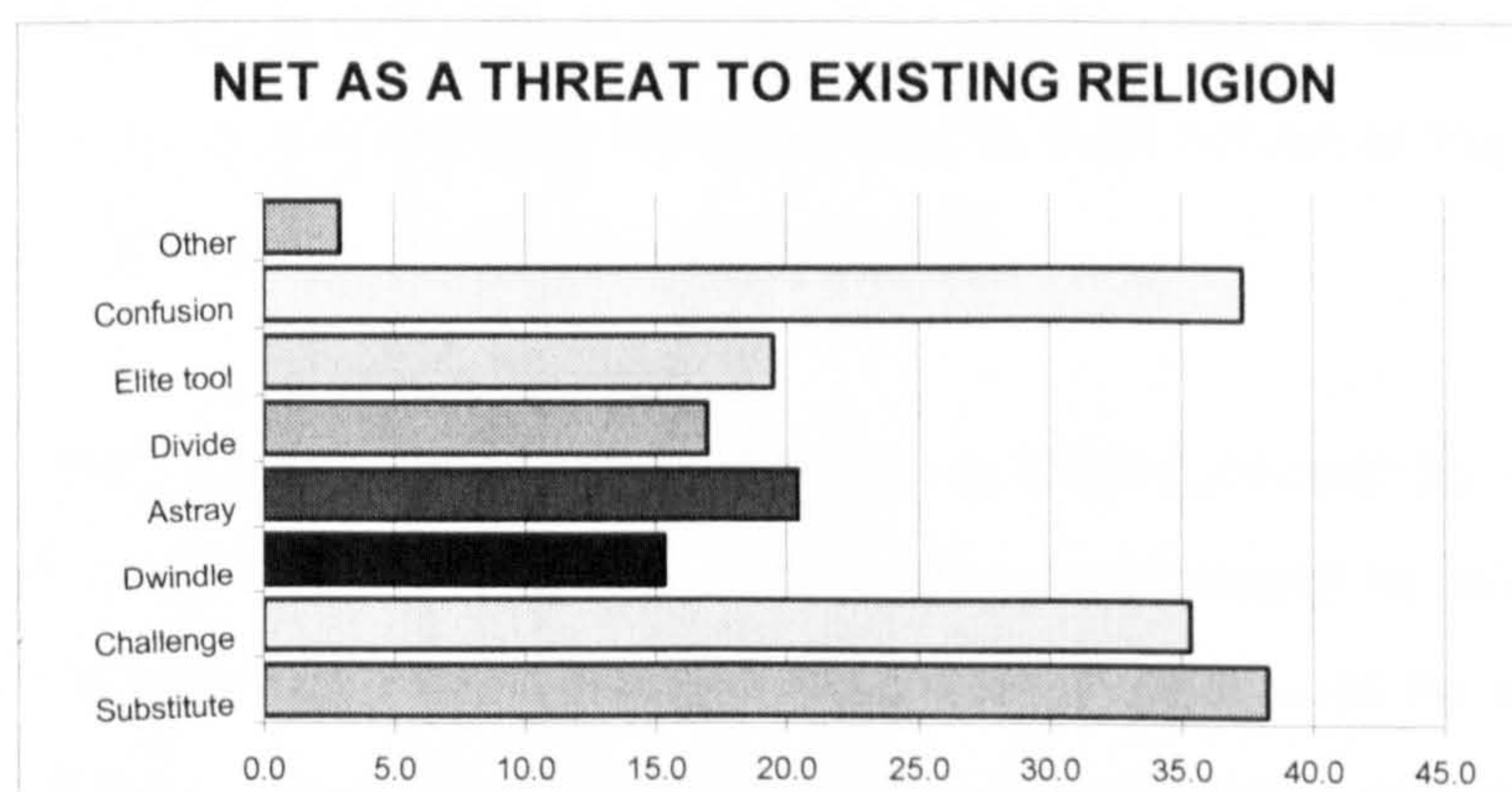


Chart 21. How the net can be a threat to existing religion

Key:

1. The net could become a substitute for actual religious practices
2. The net could challenge the teaching of religious authorities and role of the clergy
3. The use of the net could lead to dwindling numbers of those who practice their faith
4. The use of the net could lead people astray
5. The net could increase the divide between haves and have-nots
6. The net could be seen as a tool of the elite
7. The net could add to the confusion caused by inauthentic religious sources on the net

4.2.12. Ways in which the net could be a threat to religious practices

Respondents were asked whether they perceived the use of the Internet for religious purposes to be a threat or asset to religion. Many of the respondents were able to identify the possible threats that the use of the Internet could pose to the Church and the practice of the faith. About a third of respondents felt that the Internet could be a threat to existing religious practices, since it could become a substitute for them (38.3 percent); or, that it could add to the confusion caused by inauthentic religious sources on the net (37.3 percent); or, that the net could challenge the teaching of religious authorities and the role of the clergy (35.3 percent). About a fifth of respondents (20.4 percent), felt that the use of the net could lead people astray, or that it would result in discord and division, as it could be seen as a tool of the elite (19.5 percent) and could increase the divide between the haves and the have-nots (16.9 percent). Lastly, a small number of the participants (15.3 percent), felt that another way in which the Internet could be a threat to existing religious practices would be that the use of the net could lead to a dwindling number of people practicing their faith.

More male users believed that the use of the Internet for religious purposes would lead to church authority being challenged, people would be led astray and that it could cause division in the church and lead to confusion, caused by inauthentic sites. More female users were of the opinion that use of the Internet would result in the net becoming a substitute for actual religious practices, as net rituals and online groups might replace actual rituals and communities. More females also voiced the fear that use of the Internet would favour the elite, rather than the vast majority of ordinary believers.

In comparing the perceptions of the three age groups, all three groups appeared to perceive that the Internet, used for religious purposes, could lead to the net becoming a substitute for actual religious practices, that it could lead to the net challenging Church teachings and authority, and add to the confusion caused by inauthentic religious websites. They also feared that use of the net could result in believers being led astray.

More seniors (19.3 percent), believed that net use could lead to division between haves and the have-nots, as the net could be perceived as a tool exclusively for the elite. More users of the middle age group (18.9 percent) believed the use of the net inevitably lead to dwindling numbers who practice their faith. While 47.3 percent of youth saw net use as a substitute for religious practices and as a possible challenge to Church teachings, few youth (12 percent) felt the net was a tool of the elite, or that its use would lead to dwindling numbers of believers. This could be because, for most youth, use of the net was a common-place, everyday experience, and using the net had not drawn them away from the Church.

Among the religious groupings, almost a third of all groups feared that use of the Internet for religious purposes would lead to the net substituting for actual religious practices, thus posing a threat to the teaching authority of the Church and the role of the clergy. Of all the religious groups, there were more seminarians who voiced these fears than any other group. Another fear, voiced by over 40 percent of priests, seminarians and laity, was that use of the Internet would add to the confusion caused by inauthentic religious sites. A fifth of seminarians, priests and laity, felt that net usage for religion would lead people astray. A third of the priests and women religious believed that using the net for religious purposes would be seen as a tool for the elite. A small number of priests and laity were concerned that net usage for religion would increase the divide between the haves and the have-nots, while there were some women Religious who foresaw that use of the net would lead to dwindling numbers of practicans.

Question 13 Should the net be used for religious purposes by the clergy or laity?

Table 22

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			
		Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Clergy >	31.5	35.8	29.2	28.7	30.2	34.0	28.3	46.2	39.8	36.8
Laity >	19.2	22.1	17.6	16.7	17.2	22.2	19.6	19.2	24.8	15.8
Laity voice	20.5	23.7	18.8	19.2	21.9	20.8	20.0	17.3	26.3	26.3
Both	70.3	71.9	72.0	71.0	74.6	70.2	72.9	78.8	68.4	68.4
Other	1.9	2.3	1.6	3.0	1.8	1.6	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0

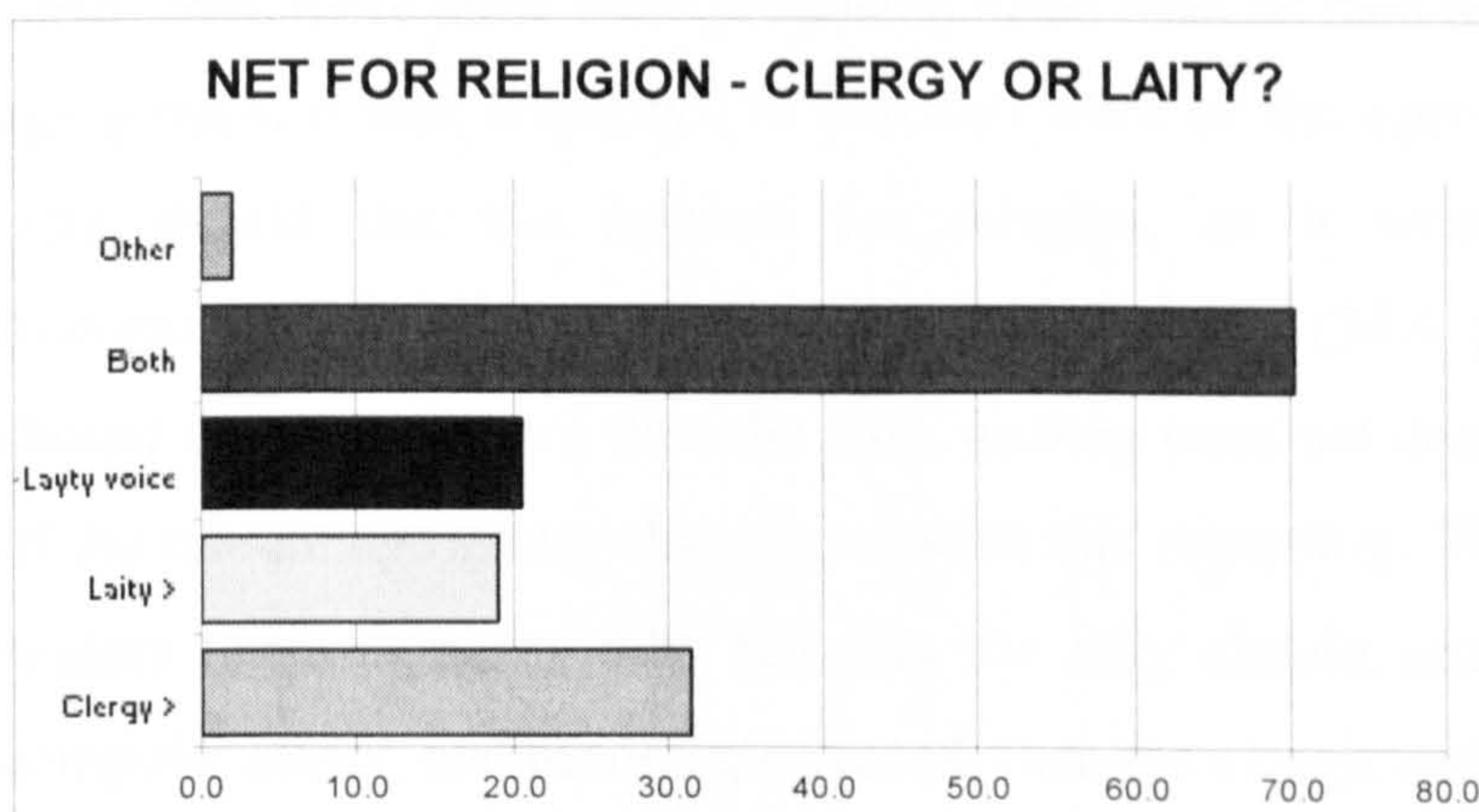


Chart 22. Who should use the net for religious purposes, the clergy or the laity?

Key:

1. The clergy should use it more, as they are not doing enough at the moment to promote it
2. The laity should use the net more, as they are computer savvy and have more experience
3. The laity should use it more, as it gives them the possibility to have their voice heard
4. Both groups should use it more, as it will be mutually beneficial
5. Any Other

4.2.13. Who should use net for religious purposes, clergy or laity?

An overwhelming majority of respondents (70.3 percent) felt that both clergy and laity should use the net, as it would be mutually beneficial. However, about a third of the respondents (31.5 percent) felt that the clergy should use it more, as they were not doing enough at the moment, while about a fifth of respondents (20.5 percent) felt that the laity should use the Internet more, as it gives them the possibility to have their voice heard. Less than a fifth of respondents (19.2 percent), felt that the laity should use the net more, as they were computer savvy and had more experience.

There were more male users proposing these reasons than female users. Among the three age groups, a vast majority (70 percent) were of the opinion that both priests and the laity should use the Internet for religion, as it would be mutually beneficial. Interestingly, more members of the senior group (34.4 percent) felt that the clergy should use the net more than the laity, as they were not doing enough at present. A third of the middle age group also agreed with this reasoning. There were about a fifth of the seniors (22.2 percent), who felt that the laity should use the net more as they were computer savvy, and more experienced, than the clergy, and using the net would give the laity the possibility to have their voice heard. Of all the age groups, the youngest group had the least number who shared their opinions in this matter.

Among the religious affiliation groups, a vast majority of the laity and clergy (75.8 percent), and a slightly smaller number of women Religious and seminarians (68.4 percent), held the opinion that both clergy and laity should use the Internet for religion. Almost half the priests (46.2 percent), and many of the women Religious, however, felt that priests should be using the Internet more than the laity as they were not doing enough to promote it. Interestingly, more women Religious than other groups felt that the laity should use the Internet more than priests, as the laity are more experienced and would have the possibility to have their opinions heard.

Question 14 Would the net replace links with communities to which we belong?

Table 23

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Total	Sex		Age			Religious Affiliation			
		Males	Female	21&24	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
Giveup Com	22.9	25.4	21.6	26.6	20.7	23.0	22.5	25.0	25.6	26.3
Less time	21.6	19.4	23.3	26.0	18.3	22.7	22.1	15.4	24.8	31.6
Less risky	10.9	11.0	11.3	10.3	7.1	13.7	11.3	5.8	15.0	5.3
Control	14.3	17.4	12.2	18.4	11.2	14.5	15.0	13.5	14.3	5.3
Both Com	43.3	47.2	42.1	42.9	51.5	41.2	44.8	55.8	40.6	63.2
No Net Co	10.3	13.0	8.7	16.7	5.9	9.5	11.3	7.7	6.0	5.3
Other	1.6	2.7	0.9	1.8	1.8	1.3	1.5	1.9	0.0	5.3

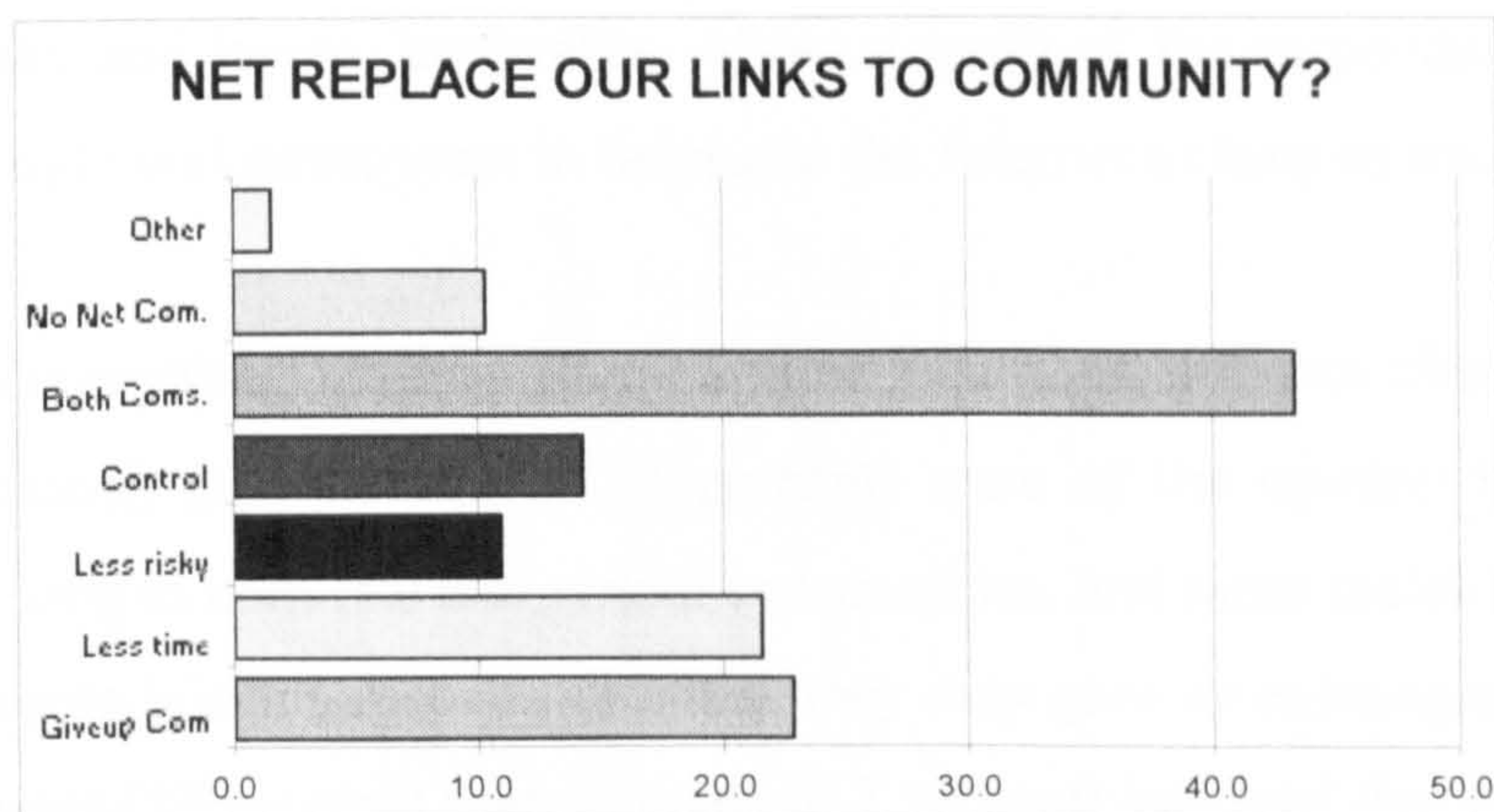


Chart 23 Will the net replace traditional community?

Key:

1. If they join Internet communities, people may give up existing communities
2. Belonging to an Internet community is less time consuming and, so, preferable
3. Belonging to an Internet community is less risky and, so, preferable
4. In the Internet community, I am in control of my commitment and so this is preferable
5. People will want to belong to Internet as well as traditional communities
6. People will never want to belong to the Internet community as long as traditional ones existed.
7. Any other

4.2.14. Would the net replace links with communities we belong to?

A little less than half of the respondents (43.3 percent) felt that people would want to belong to the Internet as well as to traditional communities, which would imply that, while believers held onto their membership of existing communities, they were open to also belonging to online communities. However, about a fifth of the respondents (22.9 percent), feared that, if users join Internet communities, they may give up existing communities. Respondents gave reasons for being open to online communities: about a fifth of the respondents (21.6 percent) felt that belonging to an Internet community is less time consuming and hence preferable; about 14.3 percent felt that, in the Internet community they are in control of their commitment, hence, it is preferable; about a tenth of the respondents (10.9 percent) felt that belonging to an Internet community is less risky and hence, preferable. About a tenth of the respondents (10.3 percent) felt that people will never want to belong to the Internet as long as traditional communities exist.

In comparing male and female user responses, one can observe that more males (47.2 percent) than females (42.1 percent) were of the opinion that people would want to belong to both real and virtual communities, and more males (25.4 percent) feared that if people join Internet communities they may give up existing communities. Thirdly, more males (13 percent) than females (8.7 percent) believed that people would never want to join online communities as long as traditional ones existed. There were more females who believed people might prefer online communities because they are less time consuming and risky than real community membership.

Among the age groups, fifty percent (52.5 percent) of the middle age group (25-34 years) were of the opinion that people would want to be members of traditional existing communities as well as new online groups. About 40 percent of the other two age groups also shared this viewpoint, which meant that, by and large, whether young or old, users were open to both memberships and not to one alone, excluding the other. However, a third of all groups feared that, if people joined Internet communities they might give up

membership in existing communities. Over a quarter of the youth (26.6 percent), felt this was a possibility. A quarter of the youth age group also believed that users would prefer to belong to online groups, because they were less time consuming (26 percent) and members would be in control of their commitment to the group (18.4 percent). A number of young people (16.7 percent) believed that people would never wish to join online groups as long as traditional communities existed. Seniors believed that people might prefer online groups, as they were less risky than traditional ones.

Among the religious affiliation groups, priests (55.8 percent) and seminarians (63.2 percent) had the highest number holding the view that users would be wanting to join both communities. This would imply that they did not see any difficulty in users belonging to traditional Christian communities as well as online faith communities. Less of the laity and women Religious were open to this possibility. However, a quarter of the priests, seminarians and women Religious (25.6 percent) feared that, if people joined online groups, they would give up existing communities. Less of the laity (22.5 percent) feared this possibility. Religious groups gave different reasons for users preference for online groups rather than existing groups. A third of seminarians (31.6 percent) were of the opinion that users' preference would be because they were less time consuming, while 15 percent of women Religious felt that the main reason was the risk factor, and 15 percent of youth felt that the choice was because users would be in control of their commitment to online groups. Surprisingly, there were more laity than the rest of the religious affiliation groups who felt that people would never want to belong to the Internet groups as long as traditional ones existed.

Conclusion

The findings of the focus groups and the quantitative analysis of the responses to the survey questionnaire, provide a comprehensive picture of the trends in Internet use and varied perceptions, as seen in the summary below:

- A little less than half the respondents (46.4 percent) were users of the Internet, and, of these, males (57.5 percent) used the Internet more than females (39.5 percent); the under 24 years age group was the highest users of the Internet (67 percent) and the seniors used it the least (36.1 percent). Among the religious affiliation groups, the seminarians were the highest users of the Internet (89.5 percent) and the women Religious used it least (15.8 percent) (Table 1). There were also a quarter of the respondents (26 percent) who did not use the Internet. (Table 9)
- More than half the respondents said they used the Internet to keep in touch with people (62.3 percent), and 46.9 percent for accessing information, 45.1 percent fused it to share information, besides other uses. The youngest group was the highest user of the Internet for generic purposes (82.8 percent) (Table 11)
- But only a little over a quarter of the respondents (28.3 percent) said they used the Internet for religious purposes, the main one being the need to access religious information and news. Other religious purposes of the net had even fewer users. The youngest age group members, the heaviest users of the Internet, used the Internet least when it came to using it for religious purposes (20.8 percent).(Table 12)
- The perception of the laity (34.8 percent) of the clergy's use of the net for religion, differed significantly from the clergy's self perception (65.4 percent) of their own use of the net. Only the women Religious' perception came close to that of the

clergy'. On the other hand, the clergy had a slightly higher perception (30.8 percent) of the laity's usage of the net for religion than did the laity of their own use (27.5 percent). (Table 13& 14)

- The main reason people preferred using the Internet for religious purposes rather than traditional sources, was its ease of use (53.1 percent), the user-friendly nature of the net (36 percent) and the easy availability (34.5 percent) of generally inaccessible religious resources on the net (Table 15).
- In terms of content, about half the respondents (52 percent) expected religious information and news, about 44.5 percent wanted religious teachings, and about a third expected aids for prayer, meditation and testimonies on religious websites. However, only 15.9 percent, mainly the laity and women Religious, sought an approval rating for religious websites (Table 16).
- Surprisingly, a vast majority of users expected that religion presented on religious websites should be related to current happenings, experiences and events (68.5 percent). About half of the younger users (57.8 percent), 24 years and below, felt that religious websites should present religion in a creative way (Table 17).
- Another expectation of half of the respondents across all groups, irrespective of age, sex and religious affiliation, was the need for the possibility of feedback (53.1 percent) and interactivity (52.1 percent) on religious websites. The greatest number of users with this expectation came from the youth and the seminarians groups (Table 18).

- The reasons offered for poor utilization of the net for religious purposes were: a lack of awareness of the possibility of using the net for religious purposes (56.3 percent), mainly among youth; lack of awareness of religious websites (51.6 percent), lack of enthusiasm on the part of the clergy to promote religious websites (44.1 percent), and lack of publicity (38.8 percent) for net use for religious purposes (Table 19).
- Looking ahead, respondents voiced their predictions that using the internet for religious purposes could lead to the following consequences: religion becoming connected to life (55.7 percent), a greater interest in religion (44.8 percent), lay people becoming competent in religion (43.7 percent), youth becoming interested in religion (42.4 percent), and the laity having a voice in religious matters (42.1 percent). A small percentage (5.3 percent) felt that the use of the net for religious purposes would not make any difference (Table 20).
- About a third of the respondents felt that the net could be a threat to religion, in so far as it could act as a substitute for it (38.3 percent); it could add to the confusion caused by inauthentic religious sources (37.3 percent), and challenge religious authorities and teachings (35.3 percent) (Table 21). The above reasons, proposed more often by seminarians and priests, could also be reasons for lack of use for religious purposes.
- An overwhelming majority (70.3 percent) of the respondents suggested that the net should be used both by the clergy and laity, as it would be mutually beneficial to both groups. However, a third of the clergy were of the opinion that the net should be used more by the clergy (31.5 percent), as they are not doing much about it at the

moment, while a fifth of the respondents (20.5 percent) felt that the laity should use it more as it would give them a voice in the church (Table 22).

- With regard to the fear that net communities might replace traditional faith communities, about 43.3 percent of the respondents, mainly priests and seminarians, felt that people would want to belong to both net communities and traditional communities. However, 22.9 percent of respondents, mainly the youngest users, feared that people might give up traditional communities if they joined net communities (Table 23).

What now remains is to evaluate and interpret the findings of the focus groups juxtaposed with the findings of the survey questionnaire. In the light of this composite picture that incorporates not only the general patterns of Internet usage for religious purposes in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, but also takes into consideration the varied nuances and distinctions that users have offered in their perceptions of net usage for religion, the assertions initially made about the Internet's use for religious purposes will be tested and conclusions drawn.

Chapter 5 Inferences of the Research and Conclusions

Introduction

In this chapter we firstly recall the major claims made about the Internet with regard to its social impact on society today. As we saw in the first chapter, the Internet was said to have a global influence on all peoples, everywhere, from every walk of life. Is it true that the Internet has influenced life significantly because of the ever growing number of users, across every strata of society and across geographical boundaries? In the light of the data that has been collated from the research, this claim will be analysed. This data will provide the background for the research. Next, we test the assumption that the use of the Internet for religion is influencing religion and its practice. From the analysis of the data, inferences will be drawn about the uses of the Internet in Mumbai, India, people's attitudes, and perceptions of the relationship of Internet with the Catholic faith, the role of the Church and its members, both clergy and laity. The chapter goes on to analyse the reasons why the net is not widely used for religious purposes in Mumbai. This analysis will be based on the evidence of the data collected, on perceptions expressed and underlying assumptions by the respondents in relationship to the Church and the roles played by the clergy and laity in their net use.

Questions and issues related to net usage, touched upon in the initial chapter, will be re examined in the light of the research findings. The chapter will also try to explain a duality of response towards the net, namely, on the one hand, a gradual openness towards using the Internet for religious purposes and, on the other, a hesitation and

caution in using the Internet. Certain hypotheses are then proposed as the underlying causes for poor net usage. These issues would need further study to establish whether the Internet can be fully utilized for religious purposes by Catholic users in India.

Part I

5.1. Background of research: Is the net a global phenomenon?

There is no doubt that the Internet has been one of the fastest growing forms of media, and that it is being used by more and more people. The speed and extent to which the Internet has been embraced by a wide diversity of people, in growing numbers, in different parts of the world, is said to be unparalleled in human history. The rate of growth is staggering. Worldwide, the number of Internet users is estimated to have been 16 million in 1995, 378 million in 2000 (Castells 2001:260), and more than 500 million in 2002 (Wellman and Haythornewaithe (2002:11). The latest statistics reveal that there are half a billion Internet users, and these figures are set to double in the near future. It was also claimed that the Internet would spread rapidly all over the world so that it would truly become a universal medium, influencing all people, in every continent, from all cultural backgrounds.

Paradoxically, though the Internet has grown, it has not spread everywhere, and universal access and meaningful participation does not exist; the digital divide is very real. Castells points out, for example, "London has more Internet domains than the whole of Africa" (2001:264) and less than one percent of Africa's population has

Internet use (2001:260). Rao, in a report in the *Asia Pacific Internet Handbook* of 2001 states that,

While accounting for 50 percent of the global population, Asia represents only 16.6 percent of the world's Internet users....Approximately one half of Asian countries have Internet penetration of less than 3 percent, whereas Singapore and Australia boast rates of 39.9 percent and 19.2 percent respectively (2002:6).

The Asia-Pacific Internet Handbook claimed that the user base in India is expected to cross the 20 million mark in 2003. (Rao, 2002:273). BBC Online News UK edition reported that India is expected to have 25 million Internet users by 2005, up from 5.5 million at the beginning of 2001 (BBC News Online, 2004). Looking at Mumbai, the *National Readership Survey* reveals that, in 1999 Internet penetration in Mumbai was only 1.6 percent, in 2003, it increased to 5.6 percent (NRS Surveys, 2003). While there is some growth in Internet usage in Mumbai, the vast majority of the people still do not have the possibility of using the Internet. Osama Manzar questions whether the Internet is really influencing India in any significant way, especially since the numbers are still relatively small:

There could be an argument that the Web makes many things possible which earlier were not even thinkable. But for these "possibilities" to crystallize, think also of the fact that Internet is not yet a medium of communication for over 99 percent of more than 1,000 million Indians..... India has 3.6 PCs per thousand people, as compared to 362 in the US, 217 in Singapore, 145 in Ireland and 9 in the Philippines (Manzar, Rao & Ahmad, 2001: 01, 34)

It is also true that the Internet has become a regular means of social contact for people from all walks of life. Research in the United States seems to indicate that the most popular usage of the Internet is for maintaining social contact with people. Registrations

for personal e-mail addresses are said to be growing at over 400% per year. *Pdom*, a web-domain company reports:

There were approximately 4 million personal domain names registered worldwide at March 2002, and this is forecast to increase dramatically over the next two years to over 50 million personal domains. Of these domains around 25% are based on the person's name and the remainder of domain names are as diverse and personal as their owners. (<http://www.pdom.com/explosive.htm>)

Use of the Internet for e-mail also seems to be confirmed in Mumbai, with 62.3 percent of users claiming this as their primary use of the Internet (Table 11). Besides the use of telephones, and especially mobile phones, which are growing in popularity for text-messaging in India, the Internet has become an additional means of social contact. E-mail and chat groups are most popular with teenagers (90.1 percent) and young seminarians (89.5 percent) for whom keeping in touch with companions, family and friends was a high priority (Table 11). The Internet was also used to access specific information and to share information and messages, by little less than half the users.

Social composition of users

As we have seen, it was claimed that, besides spreading all over the world, the net would be used by all types of individuals, irrespective of their social class and status. Wellman and Haythornewaith point out that research done has revealed that

of those who have access to the net, US and Canadian users are almost evenly split between men and women, but with higher numbers of young users, whites, urban, higher incomes, higher education levels and more years of access (Howard, Rainie and Jones; Kavanaugh and Patterson; Nie, Hilligus, and Erbring)Previously in North America – and currently in the rest of the world –more men than women are likely to use the Internet.(Chen, Boase and Wellman; Katz and Rice; National Omnibus 2000) (2002:16)

Commenting on research in the Asia Pacific region, Madanmohan Rao says that: “out of 3 billion people in Asia, more than two-thirds –over 2 billion- are less than 35 years of age.” (Rao, 2002: 25).

Social composition of Net users in Mumbai

As has been pointed out earlier, the research was undertaken mainly among Catholics of the Archdiocese of Mumbai, and certain observations need to be made before drawing out the conclusions of the research. Firstly, though Mumbai could be said to be typical of the dioceses of the Catholic Church in India, yet there would be major differences between older and well-established dioceses like Mumbai and many newly erected ones. Secondly, there could be differences between Mumbai and the dioceses of the North of India, where there are relatively fewer Catholics and the diocese of the South of India, which have a larger number of believers. Thirdly, the focus groups and the survey work were undertaken among English speaking members of the Catholic Church; hence they would not be representative of vernacular-speaking groups, which do exist in the Archdiocese of Mumbai and in most of the dioceses of the Catholic Church in India. Fourthly, to a large extent, the Catholics who participated in the research were largely from the middle-income, middle-class society and would not be representative of the lower income and below the poverty-line groups. Fifthly, in terms of their faith, the vast majority of the Catholics of Mumbai would be traditional believers used to a westernized form of Christianity, partly because of the cosmopolitan nature of the city of Mumbai and its exposure to a Westernized lifestyle, and partly because of the Portuguese-influenced faith traditions and ritual practices inherited from St. Francis Xavier and the Portuguese missionaries in Goa, and perpetuated by the goans, who

settled in Mumbai and the 'East-Indian' fisher-folk, the original inhabitants of Mumbai.. All these factors point to the fact that the inferences of the research are mainly applicable to the Catholics in Mumbai and may not be valid in drawing general conclusions about the Catholic Church in India.

Our research, conducted in Mumbai, mainly among Catholics, revealed that Internet users are generally young, male, well-educated, fairly well-to-do people. There were more male than female users, the ratio being 57.5 percent to 39.5 percent, revealing that the Internet is male-dominated at the moment. The Internet appears to be a tool used more by the younger age group, 24 years and below (66.7 percent), with only a third of the seniors (36.1 percent) using the Internet. The research revealed that the Internet is a medium used more by post-graduates (59 percent) and graduates (47 percent) than by those with a high-school education (41 percent). The research also revealed a bias regarding Internet use also with regard to the place of use. A large number of respondents use the Internet from home, which implies that it is used by those who can afford their own computer at home (42.9 percent). But it also revealed that more than fifty percent of users access the computer from cyber-cafes (57 percent), at college/school (56 percent), and at work (48 percent). (Appendix XII)

With regard to religious groups, the Internet was used most by young seminary students preparing for the priesthood (89.5 percent), by more than half the young priest users (61.5 percent), by fifty percent of the laity (51.3 percent), and least by women Religious (15.8 percent) (Table1), confirming that it is mainly used by young, male educated

people. The research data revealed that a quarter of the respondents were non-users of the Internet, and among these there were twice the number of females, a small number of youth non-users (4.9 percent), as against a third of the senior non-users (35.6 percent). Almost half of the women Religious respondents were non-users of the net (Table 9).

We can conclude that the use of the Internet among Catholics in Mumbai is generally the monopoly of the young, who are using it not only for their social contacts, but also in other spheres that affect their lives. From the available data, we can also conclude that a large number of Indians, who are female, uneducated, elderly, unemployed and poor, would not have access to the Internet. This would also imply that the Internet is not available to a fairly large percentage of Catholics.

5.2. Is Religion/Church influenced by the Internet usage?

It has been claimed that the use of the Internet would influence more and more aspects of people's lives, business, commerce, education, health, entertainment, and even the way people worship and live their religious beliefs. Religious believers and researchers have been exploring the effect the use of the Internet will have on religion. The Internet, like other communication technologies, cannot be viewed as neutral in its effects, since the media are not mere media for transmission of messages. As Marshal McLuhan (1965) pointed out, years ago: "the medium is the message," this could be true of the Internet as well. Addressing the question of the influence of the net on religion Jeff Zaleski pointedly asks:

How will the ease of access to the universal store of sacred knowledge reshape the spiritual life of our species? Will religions keep their belief systems and their body of believers intact in a virtual world where it only takes a click of a mouse to jump from one temple, one mosque, one church to another? (1997:4)

Research done elsewhere: Net is increasingly being used for religion

Research undertaken in the United States of America has shown that a substantial number of believers in the U.S. are using the Internet for religious purposes. Some researchers have even forecast that this number will increase as more people drop out from membership of Churches. *The Barna Online Research Study* found that, in 2001, in the U.S., eight percent of adults and 12 percent of teenagers used the Internet for religious or spiritual experiences.

Among the findings of the studies described in the report is that ‘born again’ and evangelical Christians are every bit as likely to use the digital superhighway. Catholics and mainline Protestants are less likely to use the Internet than are Baptists and Protestants who attend non mainline churches (Barna: 2001)

However, what seems interesting is that less than one percent of all adults, and just two percent of teens, currently use the Internet as a substitute for a physical church. Most people indicated that they do not intend to replace their physical contacts and involvement with their congregation with a Net-based faith experience (Barna Research 2001). It is somewhat surprising that George Barna, who directed the Barna Research Study for the Barna Institute, made this prediction:

By the end of the decade we will have in excess of ten percent of our population who rely upon the Internet for their entire religious experience. Some of them will be individuals who have not had a connection with a faith community, but millions of others will be people who dropped out of the physical church in favour of the

cyberchurch (<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=90>) (Barna Research 2001-Online Report).

The Pew Internet & American Life Project (2003), the other major study undertaken in the United States, revealed that the Internet has become a positive force in many faith communities. Their online report, *Wired churches, wired temples*, suggests that

there is a healthy audience for spiritual material online. Some 21 percent of Internet users, between 19 million and 21 million people, have looked for religious or spiritual information online..... In the overall population, online women are more likely than men to have looked for religious information (23 percent to 19 percent), Those in middle age are more likely than their younger or older counterparts to have sought spiritual material and online parents are more likely than non-parents to have hunted for such information (http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Religion_Report.pdf)

In a summary of their research, 'Faith Online', Hoover, Clark and Rainie summarised their findings as follows:

Nearly two-thirds of the adults who use the Internet in the United States have used the Internet for faith-related matters That represents nearly 82 million Americans. Among the most popular and important spiritually-related activities: 38% of the 128 million Internet users have sent and received email with spiritual content. 35% have sent or received online greeting cards related to religious holidays. 32% have gone online and read news accounts of religious events and affairs. 21% have sought information about how to celebrate religious holidays. 17% have looked for information about where they could attend religious services (http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/126/report_display.asp)

These American studies would appear to confirm the claim that the use of the Internet for religious purposes has influenced people's religious practices, and may have further influence on the future of Christianity in the United States. Looking at the American surveys, Michael Vlach, writing in 'Pastors.Com', on how people of faith are using the net, summarised the findings, wondering whether the 'Christian 'Way' and the 'Information superhighway' have intersected with each other, Comparing the findings of

the *Barna Research 2001* and *Pew Internet and American Life Project 2002* research he suggests that Christians and people of other faiths are increasingly using the Internet as part of their faith experience. Vlach pointed out that:

- according to the Pew Study the top five activities of religious surfers are: looking for information about their faith (67 percent), looking for information about another faith (50 percent), emailing a prayer request (38 percent), downloading religious music (38 percent), and giving spiritual guidance via email (37 percent). (<http://www.pastors.com/article.asp?ArtID=2071> (Pastor.com 1-4-2002)).

The above mentioned research projects undertaken by two independent research institutions in North America have been highlighted and compared with the research done in Mumbai not with the intention of using the American findings as a yard stick or as the norm for what needs to be replicated in India or elsewhere but merely because there are no other findings available of research done about the use of the Internet for religious purposes. The comparison merely illustrate that there are some areas of similarities in the way the Internet is being used for religious purposes. But it also indicates that there are differences perhaps because of the cultural make-up of the users as well as the faith experiences and needs of the believers.

Dawson and Cowan in their recent book, *Online Religion*, while believing that the Internet is changing the face of religion worldwide, are yet unsure of the consequences:

Life in cyberspace is a continuity with so-called 'real life', and this holds true for religion as well. People are doing online pretty much what they do offline, but they are doing it differently. Activity is being mediated electronically, and this mediation allows things to be done that are somewhat new and sometimes entirely innovative. The consequences for religion are as yet largely unknown. Will this new way of being religious make a difference in how religion is conceived and practiced in the future? (Dawson and Cowan, 2004:1)

Part II Our Research Implications

5.3. The Internet is not much used for religious purposes in Mumbai

Our research was undertaken among the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Mumbai to test whether the Internet is being used for religious purposes, and whether the use of the Internet was influencing religion and the way it was practiced. Those who participated in the focus group discussions were Catholics who were, to a large extent, users of the Internet and were expected to be open to using it for religious purposes. Respondents who filled in the questionnaires, which were administered to Sunday mass congregations, theology and bible-study groups, youth groups, and individuals, volunteered to do so because they were interested in, and familiar with, Internet usage. The conclusion, that the Internet is not widely used for religious purposes by the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Mumbai, was arrived at from the evidence of the data concerning the small number of users of the net for religious purposes, and also from the few religious websites hosted from Mumbai.

5.3.1. Small numbers of people using the net for religious purposes

While around half of the respondents said that they used the Internet for generic purposes, less than a third said they used the Internet for religious purposes. Analysing those who use the Internet for religious purposes, we find that those in the under 24 years age group (20.8 percent) were least interested in using the Internet for religious purposes, whether it was for scripture-study, faith-sharing, prayer or belonging to an

online faith community. A third of the senior-most age group (30.1 percent), and the middle age group (34.9 percent), on the other hand, expressed the need to use the Internet for obtaining religious information and news (Table 12).

There are two possible reasons for the relatively low use, that are shown by the logistical data: namely age and sex. Women, (39.5 percent) who are generally considered to be more religiously inclined than men, do not use the Internet for religion as much as men (57.5 percent), and women Religious are the least users of all (15.8 percent). (Table 1) Secondly, youth, who are the highest users of the Internet (67 percent), and also the heaviest users for keeping in touch with others (82.8 percent) (Table 11), appear to be less interested in religion than in other matters. There could be other factors, which we will examine later, that could explain why the Internet is not being used for religious purposes by Catholics in Mumbai. Priests and seminarians found the net to be very useful for their work of sharing religious information and teaching as well as for study, prayer and sharing the faith (Table 11).

5.3.2. Small number of religious websites hosted from Mumbai

While there has been growth in the number of websites on the Internet dealing with religious topics, as seen in the number of religious sites accessed (Chapter 2), we cannot detect any significant increase in the number of websites dealing with the Catholic faith in the Archdiocese of Mumbai. As can be observed on the official website of the Archdiocese in 2002 and 2004, the number of websites posted by Archdiocesan and

religious institutions in the Archdiocese of Mumbai stood at around 25 in 2002, and these have only marginally increased in the following two years (<http://www.archbom.org>). Of the 118 parishes in the Archdiocese of Mumbai only 6.7 percent have parish websites. The other religious websites hosted from the Archdiocese of Mumbai are promoted mostly by religious orders, or by Archdiocesan institutions. There are hardly any websites posted by laypeople from Mumbai, with the exception of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

The reasons for this stagnation could be many. Parishes may not be interested in hosting a website because of the cost involved in acquiring a web domain, paying for the services of a webmaster to maintain and update the site, the Internet connection charges, and, ultimately, because the Church still does feel the need to have a website that caters to a very small section of the elite. Even in Mumbai parishes that have a website, people accessing the site are relatively few, as most of the parishioners do not have Internet connections. Youth, who are the main users of the net, do not have access at home, and would not think of accessing religious websites on the college campus, or in the cyber-cafes because of other priorities or peer pressure. The clergy believe that their main pastoral responsibility is to serve the majority of their parishioners, rather than an elite section of them who are Internet users. Priests have, therefore, not bothered to update their Internet skills or to use lay resource persons for this ministry. All these factors could be responsible for the small number of religious websites hosted from the Archdiocese of Mumbai and, consequently, for the lack of awareness of the use of the net for religious purposes.

5.4 Perceptions of why the net is not used for religious purposes

Besides the above mentioned reasons, respondents also shared the reasons they felt caused the Internet not to be used for religious purposes in Mumbai, as well as their perceptions of the relationship between religion and use of the Internet for religion. The reasons offered for the poor use of the internet for religion tended to put the onus on external factors related to Internet use.

5.4.1. Lack of awareness of religious usage of the net

The reasons, given by half of the respondents (56.3 percent), as the main reason for not using the Internet for religious purposes, was lack of awareness of the possibility to use the net for religion, and the lack of awareness of the actual existence of religious sites (51.6 percent). Given the perceptions of the Internet as a tool for social contact, for study and relaxation, it is not surprising that most people claim to be totally unaware of the religious potential of the Internet. Most of the young users of the net (64.7 percent), who are perhaps more exposed to the Internet as an information and recreational tool, appear to be totally ignorant of its spiritual possibilities (Table 19). Most Catholics, when asked about why they were not using the Internet for religious purposes confessed total ignorance about this possibility. A young priest, who used the net frequently for pastoral purposes was of the opinion that lack of information was the reason for poor usage of the Internet for religious purposes:

It's mainly because we don't get the information. What happens, basically, most people don't know much about what's happening in the West in terms of religion,

because very few people talk about it, very few people tell you what you can get, where you can get it from. (Young Clergy Focus Group)

A member of the Basel Mission Christian group felt that, besides being unaware of religion on the net, people prefer traditional religious practices to newer ones.

I don't think many people use this, I don't think people are first aware of (religion) on the net, and I think they would rather go the traditional way, like the books, religious books and magazines rather than go through the Internet.

(Christian Church Focus Group)

Though the Vatican made an official pronouncement and promulgated two documents, 'Church and the Internet' and 'Ethics and the Internet' in 2002, the Catholic laity, and even the clergy, appear to be largely unaware of the documents' contents. This may either be because of the lack of interest in the topic, or because there was not enough publicity given to the pronouncements of the official Church, or because of other pastoral priorities and concerns.

5.4.2 Financial constraints in using the Internet

Perhaps the other perceived reasons why the Internet is not being used for religious purposes, are the high cost of using the net and the lack of the skills and facilities, both of which would influence possible use of the Internet. Our research indicated that about a quarter of the respondents (24.8 percent) perceived financial considerations as one of the causes for poor net usage (Table 19). While it is true that many do have Internet facility at home, there is a fairly large number who use the net mainly at work, college, or in cyber cafes. Colleges and work places provide free connections and thus it is more

economical to use the net there. Our research indicates that 57 percent of the respondents in Mumbai use the cyber-café for accessing the Internet (Appendix XII).

If people were to surf the Internet for religious use, there is more likelihood that this would be done in the privacy of the home, rather than at college, work or in the cyber cafe. The facilities provided at college and at work are mainly meant for accessing information relating to studies or work, and not for other purposes. Hence, using these facilities for surfing religious sites at work, or at college, would be restricted. If one uses the cyber-café, besides the uncondusive environment for surfing the net for religious purposes, there is the over-riding concern of paying by the minute for time spent on the net. One would need to be very highly motivated to spend money to access religious information, which may or may not be satisfying, rather than for gaming and entertainment. A seminarian from St. Pius College, Goregaon, Mumbai, felt that, given that the religious search can be confusing, youth are not motivated to pay to find answers to their religious queries:

I found that there are thousands of sites which make confusing statements and you can't just go to the cyber café to search for answers. I mean, you can't spend money there trying to search for a religious answer. It is too costly. It is not everybody who can afford a P.C. at home who can search for a religious answer.
(Seminarians Focus Group - Goregaon).

Besides the financial concern, there is the question of computer literacy and the skill needed to surf the Internet. From our research, we find that it is mainly the young who have the necessary skills for netsurfing and the young surfers have other interests and attractions on the Internet to keep them occupied. Many elders, who might be religiously inclined, do not have the necessary skills or facilities available to them. At present, the

Internet is still a novelty and most people are in the process of learning how to utilize it, familiarizing themselves with its many functions. A male member of Basel Mission Church, Andheri, wondered whether it was finance, or some other reason, that kept people away from using the Internet:

I would say not many people use it because, basically, not everyone has a P.C. at home. Secondly, people are not very comfortable with the net. I mean that not many people know how to use the computer, and not many want to know how this net can be used for the church or religion...It is not just an economical reason. Nobody is going to buy a P.C. for religious purposes. (Christian Church Focus Group – Andheri)

5.4.3. Lack of enthusiasm of clergy in promoting the Internet

Another reason offered for poor usage of the Internet is that the Church in Mumbai is still heavily dependant on the clergy for leadership and guidance in all matters pertaining to faith. The laity would not take up any initiative on their own. Respondents perceive the clergy as being largely ignorant about, and indifferent to, Internet use and its potential use for religion. Lack of enthusiasm on the part of the clergy has contributed to poor use of the Internet for religious purposes (44.1 percent). (Table 19) The laity expect their priests to be role models, and to offer them guidance in using the Internet for religion, and as long as the clergy are uninterested, and not in favour of using the Internet, it will be largely ignored as a means of practising and promoting the faith. A seminarian shared his impression of priests providing no guidance and help for usage of the net:

The priests, who are supposed to guide the people, are not ready to help. It is left to priest to make use of the Internet to offer information and guidance. But there is lack

of information and enthusiasm on the part of priests as well, so not many use the net for religious purposes. (Seminarians Focus Group- Goregaon)

The vast majority of the priests of the Archdiocese of Mumbai are senior clergy, who are not computer-literate, and have had no training in Internet use. Consequently, a large section of the clergy are either indifferent to the Internet or feel that it is beyond them, though they are aware that a lot of the laity are working with it, or use it at home. Even though growing numbers of the laity are computer savvy, and capable of designing religious websites, few have taken the lead in having their own religious websites. A member of the clergy admits the lack of formation, and hopes for a change for future generations of priests:

I have been looking at why priests of the older age bracket don't use the net. When we entered the seminary, we did not have access to computers or the net. We have now moved to parishes where people are talking Internet. Some parishes do have the net, but I would say ignorance is a major factor. If we are looking at a far reaching approach, it has to begin with the youngsters. So, in the Seminary, I see hope for our priests for the future (Clergy Focus Group).

For the clergy to harness the potential of the Internet, they would need to feel at home in using it, and also to see it as a valuable asset to today's ministry. Andrew Careaga, writing about his pastoral experiences in *eMinistry* in connecting with the Net generation, points out that the clergy cannot expect to minister effectively if they do not know the language, culture and customs of the people to whom they minister:

If missionaries are to be effective emissaries for Christ, they must learn the culture and the customs of the groups to whom they minister. For any evangelist to venture into the Internet before gaining a good understanding of the culture and customs of cyberspace would be arrogant – just as it would be arrogant for a missionary to expect to minister amid a culture and people about which he or she knows nothing (Carreaga 2001: 155)

5.4.4. Lack of youth interest in religious matters

Data from the research indicates that the youngest age group, the under 24 years age group, (20.8 percent) are those who are least interested in accessing the Internet for religious purposes (Table 12). A seminarian from St. Pius College, Goregaon, wondered whether the youth were interested in using the Internet for religious purposes:

I feel that the first question we should look at is: who are the users of the net? If you see the population in Bombay, the Catholics are middle class, and among them it is mostly the youth who are net users. And when you are talking about religious sites etc., I feel that youth are really not interested in it, in knowing more about faith and about religion, because they are happy with what they have (Seminarians' Focus Group -Goregaon)

Young people may not be averse to religion as such, but, at the moment, the net is a novelty to them. They want to explore the net to its fullest potential. In addition, in Mumbai, religion is looked upon as a community affair. While the religious-minded do spend time in personal prayer, the practice of faith is generally associated with religious worship within the community. Little thought is therefore, given to using the net, which is used individually. A member of the Infant Jesus parish, Dombivli, female youth group, felt that many of the youth are not interested in, or have no time for, religion:

You have to look at why aren't the young people in church. Maybe they are just not interested. If a youth is just not interested in his commitment to the church, then he is not going to go to that website. If the parents groom up the kid, that commitment to the church is important, then maybe he may go to a website. Maybe because he cannot actually go to church, he would go to a website to check out what's happening.
(Female Youth Focus Group- Dombivli)

The upward trend in using the Internet for religion among North American youth, as illustrated by American research trends, is not evident from our Mumbai research. For young people brought up in a largely affluent North American society, where religion is not necessarily part of family upbringing, the search for meaning, the quest to find reasons to believe, become more urgent. The Internet appears to support this search for finding answers to one's personal queries about faith and life. For the young people in Mumbai, religion is part and parcel of their way of life, and they are steeped in religious traditions. While they do have their queries and search for a meaningful life, their more urgent concerns are tied up to the more mundane realities of finding a good job, decent accommodation, and realizing their career plans. In this context, the Internet would be used primarily for relevant information to better their job prospects, rather than to satisfy their spiritual aspirations.

5.4.5 Traditional approach to religion

One last reason given for poor use of the net for religion was the fact that people have traditional ways of practicing their religion and, hence, did not prefer the net. Little more than quarter of the respondents (27.7 percent) proposed this as one of the reasons why the net was not used for religion and, of these, the under 24 year olds were the largest group (32.8 percent) that thought so. Surprisingly, more of the priests, seminarians and woman Religious shared this reasoning than the laity themselves (Table 19). A member of the female youth group at Dombivli suggested traditional patterns of behaviour as a reason for the poor response to using the Internet for religious purposes:

Most people believe in traditional methods of, you know, going to church and attending Mass and going to personal confession, no direct confession with the father. So they prefer the traditional way of doing things as per religion. So I think that's why the net is not popular enough for. (Female Youth Focus Group; Dombivli)

A woman Religious of the Daughters of St. Paul, Bandra, felt the problem was in the way religion was presented to the people:

Often, I think the presentation (of religion) is very static and very traditional, very, very old. The youth of today wants something new, they want something,... a new technology of communicating with others, something that will be more actual. Our presentation is very static and very traditional. (Religious Women's Focus Group)

A male youth group member, St. John Baptist parish, Thane, expressed the opinion that the Church needs to be open to new possibilities to using the net for religion:

I think that religion has to adapt to the times, and if the medium is available you have to use the medium. Maybe its a minority now, but in the future when we get more networks, and the cost goes down, it will become more and more relevant to the people. You have to explore the option. If it takes off, it takes off, but the infrastructure should be available for the people who want to do it. I think religion has to adapt. It has to change to the net. (Male Youth Focus group, Thane)

On the other hand, there were people who felt the attraction of religion was precisely that it was rooted in tradition. It would seem that young people themselves wanted traditional ways of practicing religion. A male youth member from St. John Baptist parish, Thane, pointed to the problem of offering traditional religious practices in newer forms:

People feel that we are too traditional because you have, religion as an old religion. The church has been developing and improvising on their old procedures, but there are some things that should be kept the way they are, I mean, people feel that. You cannot necessarily make religion your convenience. Just because your life style becomes busy, then what's the use, if you are trying to bend the religion according to your life style, you might well leave it. (Male Youth Focus Group, Thane)

This viewpoint seems also to be held by youth from elsewhere. James Kelly, a 22 two year old, writing in *The Universe*, (London) on youth issues, indicated what the attraction of the Catholic Church was today:

Young people are drawn to the Catholic Church because of its tradition. ...the Church of Rome is one of the few structures that has stood its ground against worrying social trends. As other faiths continue to compromise in order to attract new people, they erode their integrity. In contrast, the Catholic Church has stood firmly for what it believes, and here lies one of its greatest appeals. It is a constant in a world where whims and fancies reign supreme. (The Universe, Sunday November 7, 2004)

Part III

5.5. Ambivalence regarding using the Internet for religion

In order to explain why the net is not more widely used for religious purposes, it is necessary to understand the perceptions that people have of the use of the Internet in relationship to the Catholic faith and its practices. The issues relating to the Internet usage, highlighted in the first chapter, were explored to ascertain whether net usage for religion was perceived as threat or an asset to the Church and the practice of the faith.

5.5.1 Net and the Experience of God v/s Traditional Faith Experience

Religion, as we have seen in Chapter Two, can be viewed as an experience of God and as an expression of that experience through beliefs, doctrine, rituals, devotional practices and a way of life, lived in and with the community. In so far as the Catholic faith is an experience of God, the Church believes that faith is a gift of God, given to the believer

directly by God. Use of the Internet for religious purposes does not claim to provide this experience of God, but the use of the Internet could be visualized as an expression of religious experience, perhaps in terms of its beliefs, teachings, rituals, devotional practices in and through the Christian community.

While there will be some who claim they are having a religious experience on the net, the Church has been wary about endorsing it as a source of the experience of God. In its document on 'The Church and the Internet', while acknowledging the Internet as a powerful tool for evangelization, the Church cautions that the Internet cannot be a substitute for the experience of God, the sacraments and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community.

There are no sacraments on the Internet and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from real world interactions with other persons of faith [§ 9] (Eilers: 2002:67). Looking at the usage of the net and the traditional practices of religion, we would have to conclude that users in Mumbai do not perceive the Internet as a source of religious experience.

5.5.2 Net as source of information vs. traditional religious resources

It has been pointed out that the Internet does provide an immense, ever-growing, number of religious resources available to anyone from any part of the world. Our research has also shown that, if there is one particular religious usage to which people are inclined, it is access to religious information (28.3 percent) (Table 12). The research also revealed that 42 percent of the respondents perceived the clergy using the net for religious news

and information (Table 13) and 26 percent of the respondents perceived the laity using the net for this purpose (Table 14). Significantly, 34.5 percent of respondents shared that the reason why the net was preferred to traditional religious resources was because inaccessible information and resources were easily available through the net (Table 15). Yet, the fact remains that there appears to be some hesitation in using the Internet for accessing religious information.

Religion has been handed down through the beliefs and tenets of faith, and the rituals and practices that are an expression of the believer's faith. The prime source of religious information and knowledge has been the *Bible*, the Word of God, read and interpreted by the teaching authority of the Church. The teaching of Catholic doctrine and the basic tenets of faith have been promulgated by Church Councils, the Popes and their representatives, the Bishops, and their local helpers, the clergy. With the use of the Internet for religious information and knowledge, a new source of religious teaching has been offered to believers. The Catholic Church has been quick to discern the possibility of this particular usage. It promulgated the use of the Internet and encouraged Catholics to use its potential in the religious field. The document 'Church and the Internet' states that the Internet in particular:

offers people direct and immediate access to important religious and spiritual resources –great libraries and museums and places of worship, the teaching documents of the Magisterium, the writings of the fathers and Doctors of the Church and the religious wisdom of the ages [§ 5] (Eilers,2002:64).

Pope John Paul II, in his World Communication Day message, 2001, stated "Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communication to Christ, so that

his Good News maybe heard from the housetops of the world” [§ 3] (Eilers, 2002:83).

On the other hand the ‘Church and the Internet’ warns users about authenticity of religious sources on the net.

But it is confusing, to say the least, not to distinguish eccentric doctrinal interpretations, idiosyncratic devotional practices, and ideological advocacy bearing a ‘Catholic’ label from the authentic positions of the Church [§ 8] (Eilers, 2002:67).

The same document suggests that Church leaders evolve a system of accreditation for official and authentic doctrinal sites:

A system of voluntary certification at the local and national levels under the supervision of the Magisterium might be helpful in regard to material of a specific doctrinal or catechetical nature. The idea is not to impose censorship but to offer internet users a reliable guide to what expresses the authentic position of the Church [§ 11] (Eilers 2002: 69).

Since the information on the Internet, unless it is a copy of printed material already published, cannot be tested, believers may be reluctant to accept religious teachings from the Internet. Yet, when asked whether they would prefer an approval rating system on the net to distinguish genuine Catholic sites, only 15.9 were in favour (Table 16). The problem stems from two different issues: one is the credibility of net sources, and the other is the special character of traditional religious resources. In the first chapter, it was pointed out that net resources are growing because anyone can add their own contribution to existing resources on the web. There is no monopoly and control over the content of web pages, and existing safeguards are not able to regulate net content. Consequently, the authenticity of web pages can always be questioned. If the contents are a reproduction of existing printed books and documents, the sources may be credible in so far as they can be verified and, to a large extent, much of the matter available on

the net is previously published material, which poses no problem. Material that is published only on the net will continue to be problematic until newer standards are defined and enforced for web-based content. The transitory nature of web content, as well as the fact that web content can be easily manipulated and modified and can have multiple sources and authors, only complicates the issue of authenticity of net information.

The other issue that needs to be highlighted is the difference between digital information that the net provides, and the knowledge of God and religious teachings acquired from traditional religious sources. All digital content is impersonal by nature and can be reduced to 'bits' or units of information, taking their meaning only in relationship to one another and in the sequence in which they are presented. Firstly, while the Internet can only provide information, faith primarily deals with knowledge that is meant to affect one's life. Surfing the Internet for 'God' may provide thousands of links to information about God, which may not draw one a step closer to God, or lead one deeper into faith. It is only through sustained reflection on higher things and devotion to God that humans come to a deeper experience of Him. In his book, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, Ellul warns that the person absorbed by modern communication media "falls prey to these ways of acquiring information" and is "profoundly incapable of meditation and reflection" (Ellul, 1989:87). Schultze in his book *Habits of the High-Tech Heart* proposes that contemplation is an essential exercise of religion:

Living contemplatively is one way of regularly reminding ourselves that we are not God and that we will not become more intimate with God merely by tracking the latest information about God (2002:198).

In *Communicating for Life*, Schultze pointedly affirms that faith is not just knowledge but ultimately rooted in God. “Christian communicators listen to Jesus Christ.....We listen *to* God, and we listen *for* God.” (2002:29)

Secondly, while there is no authority that vouches for information accessed from the net, faith knowledge gets its credibility from its author, God, and from community interactions in which faith is taught. Impersonal information is a cold substitute for the personal knowledge and experience of God, and an unidentifiable ambiguous source of digital information can never replace the direct face to face experience with the people of God, the faith community. At the heart of the Christian tradition is the mystery of friendship with God and neighbour. While the Vatican website attracts thousands of hits and visitors do get the official teaching and information of the Catholic Church, a visit of the Pope in any country will draw millions of people, many of whom will confess to having a faith-experience as a result of an encounter with him.

In the context of the lived experience of the Catholic faith in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, one could ask whether people are satisfied with acquiring information about faith, or concerned about a lived experience of their faith. While, of late, the laity have grown interested in deepening their faith knowledge through courses of theology and scripture, evidenced by large numbers of students in Bible Colleges, the theology courses for the laity, and the Word Ministry classes held every year, the majority of the laity are content with traditional devotions, liturgical celebrations and the fellowship that

the Church provides. The ritualistic devotions and the communitarian aspects of the faith appear to be as important as the sacraments and the doctrinal teaching of the Church. In this context, one can also understand the popularity of the basic neighbourhood communities that have grown in the Archdiocese of Mumbai, which meet not so much the need of doctrine, but the more basic needs of friendship, fellowship and community.

The research conducted in Mumbai revealed that, by and large, believers still hold on to the traditional sources of faith and are not too comfortable in going to the net to discover its authentic teachings. However, since many users were not aware of religious websites, one cannot say whether people will use the net in future for their spiritual needs. The Church may also acknowledge that God could communicate to people using the net, which is after all also his creation. Further research would be needed in this area to establish significant usage of the Internet for religious information and knowledge.

5.5.3 Internet Religious rituals v/s traditional rituals/practices

The Internet could also be perceived as a means of participating in religious rituals and religious devotions, which are an integral part of religion. The Church, while cautioning users of the dangers of substituting the Internet for liturgical worship, the sacraments, and the direct proclamation of the gospel, points out that: “It can complement them, attract people to a fuller experience of the faith, and enrich the religious lives of users.”

[§ 5] (Eilers, 2002:65).

With religion going online, the debate about whether websites should offer online rituals and new forms of worship continues. Lisa Miller, in an online article, *God goes Online*, seems to suggest that traditional religions would need to offer online rituals:

Proponents of online worship say religion puts its future at risk by not offering ritual on the Internet. With traditional religion facing competition from fundamentalists and New Age-style fads, technology mavens say the Web offers a chance to touch an unprecedented number of souls: the unaffiliated, the spiritually reticent, the workaholics. "This technology is critical for the church," says Brother M. Aquinas Woodworth, a Benedictine monk in Albuquerque, N.M., who designed a Web site for his monastery Christ in the Desert. "If the church doesn't have this expertise, it's going to be in serious trouble." (*The Wall Street Journal*, 26-3-1999)

When respondents in Mumbai were asked whether they perceived using the Internet for religion as a threat to religion, about 38.3 percent felt the main threat would be that religion on the net could become a substitute for existing religious practices, and consequently for religion itself (Table 21). A third of all religious affiliation groups, and almost half of the youngest age group, visualized this possibility as the main threat to religion. Users of all age groups were not open to using the net in this regard. A member of the female youth group at Dombivili was inclined to feel that Internet usage might detract, and take people away, from the Church:

The priests and the committed members of the church have worked very hard to get members to be regular to church. Now, if you have a Mass on the Internet, it would be an excuse for them not to visit church regularly. Maybe they are able to, but then that would be an excuse for them not to visit church. So one way I could see that it could be detrimental, a readily available excuse: "No Father, I don't come to church because I have Mass at home on the net." (Female Youth Focus Group, Dombivili)

A priest, working in a city parish, felt that the people in Mumbai, while being possibly inclined to using the Internet for other religious purposes, were still not open to religious services on the Internet:

With regards to services, I don't know how much, in Bombay, will people accept that. I know when a priest introduced that Blessed Sacrament online, there were many who reacted saying, "why should we have it?" All that suggested was that while you are sitting at the computer, if you want to spend some time in prayer, it was left to you. I'm not convinced that people, if there's Mass or there's other things on the Internet people will stop coming to Church, because for them, the sense of coming to the Church is still central. (Clergy Focus Group)

Though the net could be used creatively to complement existing religious services of the Church, one would tend to agree with Gregor Goethals who, in her article in *Mediating Religion*, while speaking of myths and rituals in Cyberspace, questions online rituals.

An intense preoccupation with spirituality on the Web further encourages a dematerialization of reality and continues to underscore a disconnected, abstract engagement with the phenomenal world..... (The web) falls short of ritual activity because it is essentially disembodiment. Human beings moving, touching, praying, singing, lamenting, praising and gesturing in concrete liturgical settings, in real space and time: this is genuine ritual experience. (Mitchell & Marriage 2003:267)

5.5.4. Free-for-all Internet v/s and law-governed Church

As we have seen in Chapter One, a special attraction of the Internet is the minimum of boundaries and restrictions imposed on web use. The Internet appears to be wide open and operates with very few rules. While there are set procedures to be followed to download information, as well as to upload web pages from the net, there does not seem to be any operational code that systematizes the information available. This precisely is

its weakness, and at the same time, its strength. Yet another attraction of using the Internet, is that one can operate it anonymously, without the fear of people being aware of what one is looking for. Though every move on the net is traceable and there is no real privacy, the popular perception is that one is free to do what one wants, without the fear of the consequences.

Jeff Zaleski, in his book *The Soul of Cyberspace*, alludes to the democratizing nature of the net and wonders about its effect on religion:

Even as the Web carries organized religions into cyberspace, it allows a worldwide hearing of every voice within these religions. And online, not only can every voice be heard, but all voices are equal..... How will this potential eroding of hierarchy change the way we worship? The information highway is a two-lane road..... This immediate give-and-take isn't religion from top down but from bottom up, from the grassroots. The Web is organized laterally rather than vertically. It lacks a centre, and any site may be linked to any other site. In what ways will this decentralizing of communication alter organized religion (1997:5)

If, on the other hand, one looks at the Catholic Church, one observes that it has a structure which is highly organized, inherited from an institutionalized past. Many Catholics would tend to agree with Abbot Butler who, on the eve of Vatican II, proposed that according to Roman Catholics, the Church is essentially a single concrete historical society, having a "a constitution, a set of rules, a governing body, and a set of actual members who accept this constitution and these rules as binding on them" (Butler, 1965:39). Though the church is said to be "the people of God" and a "communion", what gets projected is a fairly efficient organization, highly centralized, governed by rules and regulations, that spell out the conduct of its members. Looking at the history of the Church one observes how the Church has adjusted its structure in keeping with its social environment:

In a class society, the Church tends to become more hierarchic and autocratic, in a professionally organized society, ecclesial leaders take attributes of professionals. Church men are compared with lawyers, doctors, and professors... In a media-dominated society, such has been emerging in our time, Church leaders may be forced to assume more a personal and spontaneous style of leadership (Dulles, 1987:129).

As a historic institution, there is the danger that the Catholic faith itself gets institutionalized, as it has been in some periods of its history.

This period of institutional religion was the age of the monolithic church, which aspired to as single universal language (Latin), a single theological system (Neo-Scholasticism), a single system of worship (the Roman rite), a single system of government (Code of Canon Law). Instead of encouraging new and diversified forms of thought, life, and worship, Catholics in this period tended to pride themselves on their exact conformity to Roman prescriptions (Moran, 1967:140).

A by-product of this hierarchic and centralized structure of the Church is that the majority of its members, the laity, have not had much say in its running, and have tended to play a passive role. Consequently, in the matter of using the Internet for religious purposes, the laity hesitates to use it. Perhaps they are so used to a structured existence within the Church, that they do not feel at home in the unstructured world of the Internet. Being accustomed to having many of their choices and decisions conditioned by Church authorities, they are still awaiting Church guidelines and directives before plunging into the World Wide Web. While people of other faiths do not hesitate to use the resources available on the net, either by putting up their own religious websites, or for seeking religious information, Catholics appeared to be unsure whether they were doing the right thing, and whether they were permitted by the Church to utilize the net for their faith needs. A layman, from the men's focus group from the Bandra parishes, felt that a monitoring mechanism has to be set up to keep a check and control on what goes on the Internet.

We had mentioned that there are so many web sites and we don't know which one is the right one. For years we had this system of 'Imprimatur'. There has to be some form of approval. Certainly we don't want this to run riot, so that everybody and everyone can put and run their own religious website. Then you confuse everybody. So it has to be directed and perhaps authenticated or approved by the clergy.

(Male Laymen's Focus Group, Bandra)

Other Christian Churches have most of their websites put up by the laity, while the Catholic Church in Mumbai has hardly any. Research carried out revealed that Catholics in Mumbai are hesitant to utilize the web. Perhaps they are awaiting clear directives. A seminarian felt there was no encouragement and enthusiasm on the part of the church:

I think there is less enthusiasm on the part of the church, even authority. You see many Hindu sites are coming up, like Sai baba's, and you get more and more people who are surfing their sites. But, on our part, we are not encouraging our sites. There is a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the church, but once the priests say (it's ok) people will follow. That's according to my experience.

(Seminarians' Focus Group, Goregaon)

5.5.5. Internet's interactivity v/s Church's one way communication

Another underlying reason why the Internet is not used to its full extent for religious purposes could be its interactive nature. Unlike the press, radio and television, which evoke limited interaction from the readers or viewers, the Internet, by its very nature, invites and offers the possibility of interaction. One of the attractions for young net users is precisely the possibility to make their presence felt and their voice heard. Organizations and individuals interact massively in creating, accessing and modifying material on the net. Every opportunity is offered to users to begin wherever they want, to proceed in whatever direction they choose, and to decide when and how to conclude

their use of the net. Sean Hawkey, writing in *Action* the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) Newsletter, about the online Churches that are growing on the web, believes they might be an answer to empty churches because of people's participation in online religious activities:

Many of the Church websites get more visits than the average Cathedral..... The internet is structurally opposite to church, it is anarchic and chaotic with no central authority. An individual may command the same attention and space as a global organization, it's a free-for-all. Online religion shifts power away from traditional hierarchies towards horizontal church, a church of equals, one-to-one chatroom interactivity instead of the one-to-hundreds power relationship of priests behind altars and people sitting silently in the pews. (*Action*, August 2004:6)

In sharp contrast, the Church generally has not offered much scope for believers to interact and express themselves in the Church. The onus of communication has been on the side of authority, and the role of the vast majority of the laity has been one of passive acceptance. Though the entire Church constitutes the people of God, the voice heard is the voice of the teaching Church, the hierarchy. It must be admitted that the Church wishes that the voice of the people be heard; it has encouraged participation and has sought space for dialogue and interaction. With the advent of the Internet, new possibilities are available for making the voice of the silent majority heard. The Vatican Document, 'The Church and the Internet', has alluded to this possibility:

Already the two-way interactivity of the Internet is blurring the old distinction between those who communicate and those who receive what is communicated, and creating a situation in which, potentially at least, everyone can do both. This is not the one-way, top down communication of the past. As more and more people become familiar with this characteristic of the Internet in other areas of their lives, they can be expected also to look for it in regard to religion and the Church [§ 6] (Quoted in Eilers,2002:65).

The idea of interactivity in the Church is not new, and has been promoted and encouraged since Vatican II. *Communio et Progressio* remarked that the Church needs public opinion in order to sustain a free flow of life among its members.

The truths of faith express the essence of the Church and therefore do not leave room for arbitrary interpretations. (But) there is an enormous area where members of the Church can express their views.[§ 117] (Quoted in Eilers:1997: 99)

Aetatis Novae calls two-way communication and public opinion “one of the ways of realizing in a concrete manner the Church’s character as *communio*” [§ 10] (Quoted in Eilers:1997: 127). The internet provides an effective means of implementing this vision of the Church. While the Church has very clearly endorsed the interactive possibilities of the Internet and has encouraged the laity to voice their opinion on those things that pertain to the faith and are for the good to the church, in practice this does not seem to materialize. In fact, the Vatican website, which is the official and most authoritative website of the Church, is, as of 2004, totally one-sided and has no possibility of interaction. The *Catholic Times* pointed out the difficulties.

Now the (Vatican’s) site’s directors have taken some of the first tentative steps towards interactivity, a feature of cyber-society that often is taken for granted but for the Vatican represents a host of challenges and risks. As much as recent Vatican documents have stressed the need for the Church to embrace the new media, the Vatican’s historical caution and Italian styled bureaucracy have slowed its entry into the internet age. The safe route -the one pursued until now – is to post only official texts of the Church teaching or materials that first have been carefully vetted by the Vatican Secretary of State.(*Catholic Times*, 10-11-02)

This ambiguity of approach in the matter of interactivity, and the fact that the local Church has made few efforts to promote the Internet, has left people wondering whether the Church really wishes to embrace the interactive Internet. Research in Mumbai revealed that half of all respondents, young and old, laity, priests and religious, desire

interactivity on the net (Table 18). A computer professional from the focus group at St. Joseph's Parish, Vikhroli, proposed that interactivity would enhance communication and solve many problems:

I feel, in the first place, we should venture into making it interactive. Suppose I'm facing a difficulty with a kind of a policy in the church, or with a kind of behaviour, of something which has hurt me. Where can I find immediately redressal to my problem? (Interactivity) would avoid a lot of people leaving the church also.

(Parish Focus Group, Vikhroli)

Youth especially would love to use the Internet interactively. A young member of the St. John Baptist, Thane, youth group felt the need for some space on religious websites where there could be interaction:

There have to be forums where you can express your ideas about what is happening in the church. A lot of us have opinions but don't know where to express and don't really want to get involved too much. Here, you can post your opinion, and say: "This is what I feel about what's happening. This is wrong, this is right." You could even offer words of encouragement about something. (Male Youth Focus Group)

Is the Church slow in implementing the Internet because it fears that its authority will be questioned once it opens up a space for interaction and dialogue? At the moment, one cannot reach a definitive conclusion. The laity has expressed its desire to interact and have its voice heard in religious matters, and the official Church has endorsed the interactive possibilities but, so far, Church websites uploaded from Mumbai are few and do not have much possibility for interactivity. This question of interactivity needs further exploration and research before any definitive conclusion can be arrived at.

5.5.6 Joining an online group v/s belonging to a Church Community

What comes across in peoples perception of the practice of religion is the fact that, though religious practices and devotions can be performed individually and in private, they are best expressed in and through a flesh-and-blood human community. Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* confirms such a perception of religious services:

Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the "sacrament of unity", namely, a holy people united and organized under their bishops. It is to be stressed that whenever rites, according to their specific nature, make provision for communal celebration involving the presence and active participation of the faithful, this way of celebrating them is to be preferred, as far as possible, to a celebration that is individual and quasi-private. (Abbot, 1967:147-148)

The liturgical prayers and church services are meant to be the expression of the community of the people of God, gathered together in worship. The communitarian spirit of fellowship that is generated is expected to spill beyond the rituals into community actions and a multitude of social activities. From the research conducted, it appears to be the common perception, not only of the seniors, but especially of youth, that being part of the community is a very real need. The Church, in its document on the Internet, is aware of the possibility of using the Internet "in bringing people into contact with like-minded people of good-will who join together in virtual communities of faith to encourage and support one another" [§ 5] (Quoted in Eilers, 2002:64).

However, it would appear that the Internet is viewed as a tool for solitary individuals, encouraging individualism rather than building community. Consequently, very few users (5.6 percent) perceived the Internet as an extension, or expression, of the community, which for most believers is an integral part of faith experience (Table 12). Though they might not be averse to joining an online community, this would not be a

substitute for their membership of the local Christian community. A youth member of the female youth group at Dombivli felt that, in their parish community context, use of the net was no threat to the community:

Here, people are more involved in community, they believe that you have to come to the church, meet people other than coming for the Mass. People like coming to the church because they can meet people, know about their lives. So, in a community like ours, if you tend to promote Internet, it would not be a threat, it would be just a means of keeping in touch. (Female Youth Group, Dombivli)

This perception of the Internet as an expression of the Church community differs from the United States experience of net users, who would appear to opt for an online virtual community in preference to the actual Church community. In Mumbai, only a tenth of the users use the Internet to interact with an online group. (Table 11). This was in sharp contrast to the research findings in North America, where online communities were popular with net users:

The more involved people are with the Internet, the greater their sense of online community...The more people use the Internet, the stronger their sense of online community. ...To summarize, high internet users have a strong sense of online community in general with kin. Better educated respondents have a stronger sense of online kinship, while less educated respondents have a stronger sense of online community (Wellman and Haythornewaith, 2002: 105).

5.6 People's inclination towards using the net for religious purposes

Though we have pointed out that the net is not being used to a large extent for religious purposes, yet there are some indicators that people are inclined to use it. Although the present usage of the net for religion is restricted, the expectations expressed about

religious websites and the results expected from using the net, are indicators that there is some openness towards using the Internet for religion.

While the religious usage of the net is only half as popular as its generic usage, a little over a quarter of the users find the net useful for religious purposes. Users in Mumbai explore the net for obtaining religious information and religious news (28.3 percent), for religious teachings (24.1 percent), for spiritual messages (20.7 percent) and for inspirational and study aids (18 percent) (Table 12). By and large, the greatest users of the net for these particular religious purposes are the middle age group, between 25-34 years. About a quarter of the lay users of the net appear to be interested in its religious potential. This could imply: either that there is a growing hunger for religious knowledge, or, that traditional religious sources are not offering the information sought in a way that satisfies net users. If the surfing patterns of U.S. youth are any indicator, it would appear that, as young people find their basic needs fulfilled, they tend to search for personal answers to deeper questions of faith and life. As we have seen from the data Mumbai does not confirm this trend. What may be more significant is the fact that fifty percent of the priests and seminarians are using the net for accessing religious data (Table 12). These users may influence larger number of the laity in their use of the net for religion.

5.6.1 People's expectations:

Another indicator that people are inclined towards accessing the net for their religious needs is the fact that they have expectations of religious websites. Though believers

generally favour traditional religious sources, over half of the users indicated that they would prefer to use the net for some religious needs because of the net's user-friendly nature. They also indicated that the net provides easier and more convenient access to the vast amount of religious data available through other than traditional religious sources (Table 15). There appears to be openness to accessing religious information and news in half of the net users. Their other expectations were to obtain teachings, testimonies inspirational materials and aids for religious study. Surprisingly, though some laypersons expressed doubts about the authenticity of net sources, they did not expect an approval rating for religious sites (Table 16). One significant expectation of religious websites in a large majority of users (68.5 percent) was the need for presenting religion related to daily life (Table 17). This could indicate: either that the way religion is presented at present is not relevant to life, or, that people believe that, since the web appears to have links to present-day issues and concerns, it might also present religion in the light of these concerns.

Expectation of people regarding Church's use of the net

A large majority of users (70.3 percent), felt that both clergy and laity should use the net more for religious purposes (Table 22). They indicated that the clergy need to use the net more than they do at present, and therefore believe that they need either to be trained in using the potential of the net or trained personnel should be utilized. Others felt that, since the laity are more skilled in using the net they should be allowed to use their expertise for religious purposes. Users also felt that by utilizing the net, the laity will be able to have a say in religious matters and their voice, which is largely dormant at

present, will be heard. The laity, it would appear, do not expect the net to replace Church-related religious practices and activities, but they do expect the Church's presence on the net.

5.6.2 People's hopes in realizing the religious potential of the net

The last indicator that users are inclined to adopt the net for their religious needs could be the fact that they visualize a lot of potential benefits will accrue if the net is used for religion. Over half the users (55.7 percent), believe that if the net were used for religious purposes, religion itself would be more related and connected to life (Table 20). As we have seen, this appears to be a big need at present, since the way religion is being presented does not appear to have much relevance to people's lives. A large number of users also believe that if the net were used for religious purposes, then the laity, and especially the youth, would be more interested (44.8 percent) and involved in religion and would participate more regularly in religious matters. In addition, the laity would feel more competent in voicing their opinions on religious issues (Table 20). People perceive traditional religious information sources as not easily accessible, and believe that access to religious resources would be more freely available on the net.

Keeping all these factors in mind, it would be safe to presume that there is a growing inclination to use the Internet for religious purposes among those who do use the net. If more and more people, especially youth, are adapting the net to their way of life, they believe that the Church also should adapt to the net. Being open to the use of the Internet should not be interpreted as discarding or putting aside traditional resources. Babin and

Zukowski, in *The Gospel in Cyberspace*, encourage Church leaders and ministers not to opt for an either/or approach in ministry:

We must use all means and processes of communication directly or indirectly related to humanity. This is particularly imperative as the new media landscape and the Internet continue to be woven into the ordinary tapestry of people's lives (Babin and Zukowski 2002:19).

At the moment, the inclination to use the Internet for religious purposes among the Catholics in Mumbai does not follow the trend emerging in research conducted in the United States, but this could change in the future with greater awareness of religious websites and greater enthusiasm of the clergy in promoting net use for religion.

5.7. Underlying hypotheses for why the net is not used for religion

The following hypotheses are singled out because the research undertaken did not resolve some deeper issues that need to be looked at in order to understand why the net has not been fully exploited in its religious potential. Definitive answers could not be arrived at from the data of the present research; inferences that could be drawn were ambivalent and not conclusive. These are by no means the only issues related to the use of the Internet for religious purposes that need further research in order to reach any definitive conclusion about Internet use for religion

5.7.1 The social perception of the Internet: Secular media

Analysing the habits of Internet users and the perceptions of users and non-users of the Internet, one can observe that, firstly, the Internet is seen as a user-friendly and

economical means of maintaining social contact with friends, family and colleagues. While people have not given up other means, such as face-to-face interaction and the telephone, the Internet has increased social contact. Research conducted in the United States indicates that the Internet is being used as yet another means of maintaining social contact.

- In terms of social contact, it is clear that using the Internet frequently does not substantially decrease using other communication media for contact with far-away friends and relatives. Telephone contact continues to be frequent with those living both nearby and far away. ...Email joins the telephone as the everyday means for keeping long distant ties connected. Rather than forming a unique entity, the Internet has become part of everyday life (Wellman and Haythornewaithe 2002:316-317).

Our research findings reveal that, in Mumbai, the Internet is used most (62.3 percent) as a means of social contact, especially among the young (82.8 percent) (Table 11). Secondly, the Internet is seen as an easy and efficient means to obtain information. Our research reveals that this is the most popular way (46.9 percent) in which the Internet has been used. Most people still spend a major segment of their time on the net surfing for work or study related information (Table 11). Besides being a means of social contact, therefore, the net has thus acquired a work and study ambience for most people, and this has been further strengthened by many people working and studying on the net at home. The third, fast growing, perception of the net, is that the Internet is a place for entertainment (30.9 percent) and pleasurable activities. This is particularly true for the younger generation (66.6 percent), (Table 11) who spend much time on the net playing games, downloading music and/or accessing adult entertainment sites and pornographic material.

This latter activity, indulged in mostly by young men, has created a perception of the net as a forbidden but pleasurable environment, to be visited stealthily and anonymously in secret. When questioned about this aspect of the Internet, most people prefer not to talk about it, and would not discuss it openly, as sex is still largely a taboo topic even for research. The fact that a very large number of websites are ones offering pornographic material, used anonymously for personal pleasure, or for immoral purposes like child abuse, makes the Internet in popular perception, an environment where the young and the unsuspecting can be seduced. Renu Ojha, reporting in an online edition of *Mid-Day Metro*, wonders whether the cyber-cafes are not really cosy sex cafes.

Most cafes are now offering increased privacy to their patrons and the reason is not difficult to comprehend. If you have to sustain, you need to offer absolute privacy to customers to visit the sites of their choice, which more often than not means x-rated sites.... A lot of these cafes are frequented by students from the neighbourhood. A few visits by school students to such cafes is also not completely unheard of. "Since these students are away from their family, they are generally lonely and come to chat, download and visit x-rated sites, movies and films," the cafe owner adds. (*Mid-Day Metro*, 5-9-03)

Another perception of the Internet that militates against its use for religious purposes, is the belief that the Internet deals with mundane realities, and so cannot be used for the sublime concerns of humankind. While being a marvellous invention of human creativity, and an ingenuous tool for accessing information, the Internet is perceived to be impersonal in its interactions, dubious in its authenticity and questionable in its voluminous sexual content. The Internet is also cast into the mould of mass media as it primarily provides information, and is increasingly seen as a provider of relaxation and private entertainment. If the reasons for instituting the media are for the purposes of information, education and entertainment, the Internet, perhaps more than any other

medium, fulfills these purposes to a high degree. In India, it is perceived more as a medium of social contact and as a medium of information and learning for users in relation to study and work needs. However, gradually male users are seeing it as a means of recreation and relaxation, as the craze for video games and surfing for adult pornographic material seduces users of the net.

Can the Internet, which is used for entertainment, for playing games, for relaxation, as well as for study and work, also be used for religious purposes? Are people, who look upon religion as a sacred activity, ready to utilize the Internet for performing sacred devotions and pious rituals, for accessing religious information and doctrine, for inspirational thought and prayers and for sharing religious thoughts with others? Experience shows that whatever the media presents is dressed up in the garb of entertainment to make it acceptable to audiences who wish to be amused. Information and news, which could have serious repercussions on daily life are often presented as infotainment. The media has encroached into what was once sacred territory: religion and God.

Religion in India has never been seen as entertainment. On the contrary, it has been treated as something solemn and sacred, not to be taken lightly or joked about. Hence, it is unthinkable that a medium of entertainment could be even thought of as a medium for religion. No doubt, newspapers write about religion, films are made about religious people and religious happenings in people's lives, and satellite channels telecast religious programming on a daily basis to a growing audience of religious believers, but

these have not been seen as sources of religion. With an eye to increasing television audiences and sponsorship of programmes, producers seek to present religion in an attractive and entertaining manner. Imperceptibly, religion, from being a sacred duty and a personal expression of one's relationship to God, has become the subject of entertainment. In as much as the Internet is being used for entertainment and relaxation and for pandering to baser instincts and the hidden desires of a young male audience, will it also be used for spiritual and inspirational purposes?

Perhaps the anonymous and secretive environment in which the net operates, and the growing number of pornographic websites, that sometimes intrude on the privacy of a surfer, may dissuade interested believers from using the Internet for religious purposes. Believers may find it difficult to perceive the net as a purveyor of the Christian faith. Since Catholics in Mumbai are traditional, they are slow in adopting the net, which is not only modern but is constantly evolving. Hence, the implied perception of the Internet, merely as a secular medium of social contact, information and entertainment, could be seen as one of the underlying reasons for people not using the net for religious purposes. More studies need to be undertaken in India to validate this hypothesis.

5.7.2. Mediated communications or the Church's direct approach

As explained earlier, the Catholic Church believes that faith is a gift of God which the human individual is free to accept or reject, and it cannot be acquired through mere human effort. The Church also believes that God interacts directly with individuals and

speaks to them in the depth of their hearts through Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God. God has revealed himself in Christ and continues to reveal himself today. Moran suggests that we should not refer to the 'Christ event' in the past as an end of revelation. Referring to Schillebeeckx's *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, Moran says that

the only revelation that can conquer time is not an event but a continuing personal communion. No recollection of his words, no biblical hermeneutic, would of itself be sufficient to explain the continued actuality of God's revealing himself in Christ (1967:68).

The Catholic Church has also held that God continues to reveal himself through the Sacred Scriptures and the traditions handed down by the apostles and their successors in the Church today. The handing down of this faith is accomplished through preaching and through the inspired word of God, which, in the Catholic tradition, is read aloud in community. Since the Church believes in this personal communion of faith, it has not favoured mediated forms of communication for the faith experience. Peter Horsefield, in his article in *Mediating Religion*, points out the early prejudice against writing itself:

Given the current hegemonic identification of Christianity with written and printed texts, it is instructive to note that the adoption of texts in the transmission of Christian teaching was controversial in the first centuries of Christianity. The opposition to writing was such that one of the early fathers, Clement of Alexandria, in the early third century, felt it necessary to name these objections and respond to them explicitly when writing the first chapters of his book, *Stromateis*. (2003:276)

The objections to writing, as pointed out by Clement of Alexandria, are mentioned by Osborne, in his article in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, on the 'Teachings and Writing in the first chapter of the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria.'

The living voice was the best medium for the communication of Christian truth. Writings were public and it was wrong to cast pearls before swine. To write implied that one was inspired by the Holy Spirit and this was a presumptuous claim. If one

must write, it were better that one should write badly. The heretics had shown that a clever style could mislead and corrupt. (10, 1959, pp335-43)

Clement, in his work, countered these arguments and writing came to be accepted as a legitimate and useful way of handing down the teaching and doctrine of faith. However, even today, the Church prefers face to face communication to all other forms of communication. All mass media, print, radio, television and the Internet are mediated forms of communications and, while using them to explain, evangelize, and propagate the faith, the Church believes that they cannot substitute for the immediate and direct proclamation of the Gospel. The 'Church and the Internet' document concedes that the virtual reality of cyberspace can "complement them, attract people to a fuller experience of the faith, and enrich religious lives of users [§ 5] (Quoted in Eilers,2002:65). The media have been seen as 'gifts of God' and as 'instruments' to be used. However, the Church has generally preferred to use its own instruments rather than those others that are available at any given time, as we have seen in the evolving history of Church communications. This could be due to the fact that the media available in society are seen as 'secular' and so it has tried to create its own parallel media for religious use. Though the Church has invested time, personnel and finance in the communication ministry, yet using the media for evangelization has not been perceived as a priority in the Church. This would appear to be even more so in the Church in Mumbai. A young priest expressed his frustration with the lack of support for using media for ministry:

In the Church in Bombay, communication, media, is never considered in terms of the clergy, and especially in terms of the young clergy. There is absolutely no initiative as to what sort of media are available, what resources we need, and how we are going to get them. If anything has to be done, it has to be done by an individual out of his own personal interest.
(Priests Focus Group)

In its latest document 'Called to be a communicating Church' promulgated by the Indian Catholic Bishops' Conference at Trichur, Kerala, in January 2004, the Bishops of India did endorse the use of the media and highlighted the possibilities for using the Internet for religious purposes:

While encouraging people to be media users the Church must dutifully alert our people to the threats being posed by the present mass-media and educate them,... to use the media for authentic and wholesome lives in accordance with the plan of God. We need to motivate all our Church personnel to actively participate in the new opportunities created by media and the information technology to share the Good News and spread the Kingdom of God. (<http://www.cbcisite.com/>)

In this document, there is an explicit recommendation of the Church in India to use the media for religious purposes, but in practice there does not appear to be any sustained efforts to implement and utilize the media, and especially the Internet, for evangelization in the Indian Church. The Bombay Archdiocesan Synod of 2001 did make an effort to implement the Church's recommendation about the Internet through setting up a Communication Cell, as part of the Archdiocesan structure.

The Communication Cell will seek to conscientize the masses to guard against the deterioration of values. Information Technology and media, can be a powerful tool for mission. The Communication Cell will be responsible for harnessing this power, it will use both modern infotech as well as group media and folk media for empowering the weaker sections of society (Post Synodal Document 2001, 39:6)

Three years after the Synod, the Communication Cell is still taking shape. Since other issues and concerns are the priorities of the Church's pastoral efforts, the usage of the Internet for religious purposes has not been whole-heartedly embraced. In addition, the data from the research seem to indicate that some people prefer the Church's oral tradition. A male member of the St. John Baptist parish, Thane, youth group felt that there is no need to use a medium like the Internet for religion:

Oral tradition is a very powerful tradition. Visual aids may help, but I think the point is to deliver what you are good at in the best way you can do. To improve the oral tradition, to make it more, you know, to get people to speak better, to pass on the message. It is not necessarily to shift the medium, but doing it better. That, perhaps, is more important.
(Male, Youth Focus Group, Thane)

Yet we have seen that people are beginning to use the net to meet their spiritual needs. More research needs to be done to ascertain whether people are ready to accept religious messages on the net in addition to a face to face approach in traditional faith experiences.

5.8. Conclusion and New Insights

From the research undertaken in Mumbai, it is evident that while the Internet is used for a large number of generic purposes, it is not used to a great extent for religious purposes by Catholic users in the Archdiocese. This research tried to delve into the reasons for the use/non use of the Internet, and people's perception of using the Internet for religion. Most respondents offered external reasons for what they believed were the causes for the lack of usage of the Internet. While acknowledging that some of these reasons could be grounds for non-use of the Internet, the research has tried to explore the underlying causes, the unexpressed perceptions and assumptions, about the Internet, and has proposed some hypotheses that may need further research. The fact that people are inclined to use the Internet, but are not using it, reveals an ambivalence that points to deeper issues that need addressing and clarifying before Church policy can be fully implemented by users of the Internet. The research has provided insights into how people think about religion and the Internet, and has unearthed issues giving rise to new questions about Internet use for religious purposes, especially in the Indian context.

Firstly, the present limited use of the net for religion does not dismiss the claim that the Internet is being used for religious purposes, and can influence religion. Rather than asking whether it can be used for religion, one needs to explore in what ways the net is being used, by believers and adherents to religion. Our research revealed some ways in which Catholics in Mumbai are beginning to use the Internet to fulfil their religious needs. As has been pointed out, the Internet and its potential are constantly evolving, revealing more and more possibilities. Likewise, people are growing adept at net skills and Indians have also shown their innovative creativity in applying net expertise to satisfy personal needs. As net usage becomes affordable, and common place, it could be used for newer and creative expressions of the Catholic faith.

The research undertaken in Mumbai also tried to establish whether the use of the Internet was transforming religion and, in particular, the Catholic Church. While the changes initiated by the use of the Internet have affected many spheres of life, there are some spheres that appear to remain constant. Basic human values do not change, and religion is a core value for many believers. What can and will change is the expression of religion, its practice and propagation. From the data explored, it is certain that the limited use of the net for religious purposes has not changed the Catholic faith. The traditional nature of believers in Mumbai has to some extent, prevented the Internet from being used in the expression and practice of their faith. They have restricted the possibilities to mainly accessing religious information, news and religious aids.

However, as usage increases among the young, and the not so young, believers, this may also have some repercussions on their faith practices.

In relationship to the influence of the net on religion, two areas require further exploration: net spirituality and the relevance of religion. While the net has been used for a variety of spiritual purposes, can it be said that the net creates spirituality? Some studies have proposed a spirituality of the Internet, and interested users of the net have claimed to have experienced God as they surf the net. The Catholic Church, as we have seen, has denied such a possibility and has cautioned users from seeking “a God experience” from the Internet. There are still others who wonder whether limits can be placed on God’s ways of entering the human heart. It could, therefore, be possible that in the future, as human beings use the net as a normal routine activity, they might be able to have some experience of the divine on the net. Catholic users of the net in Mumbai do not claim to have a religious experience on the net and, at the moment, are not open to such a possibility.

Other areas that call for attention is the relevance of religion to daily life and the meaningfulness of religion in today’s world. From the research conducted in Mumbai, there is a consistent demand from net users, young and old, male and female, priests, Religious and laity, that religion should be linked to life and have relevance to its daily happenings. What is being expressed is, perhaps, the hope that religion should give meaning to life and support the understanding of the happenings of day to day existence. It could also imply that religion, as it is practiced and preached today, is not fulfilling

this role, and practices of religion do not make it relevant to people's needs. Though the question was not discussed in detail at the focus groups, it cropped up frequently in believers' responses, and this indicates that it is an issue that is important to the people. Perhaps their hope is that the Internet, which is rooted in peoples' day to day experiences, and present day needs and concerns, would provide the necessary linkage between religion and life. Further avenues of research are needed in this aspect of religion and the net.

Through the use of the Internet, one aspect of the Church that may change is its understanding of its mission as the Universal Church. Catholics profess their faith in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, but their experience of the Church is shaped by their commitment to the local parochial community. Now, through the use of the Internet, there is a new experience of global interconnectivity. Users are sharing their faith and religious viewpoints and requesting prayers from users across the world. Suddenly, the Church is no longer limited to the local church, but is wide open to the network of Churches, the Universal church. It is the Internet that could reveal what it means to be a global, apostolic church. This experience of the universality of the Church did not come up for discussion in the research in Mumbai, perhaps because, at the moment, there are not too many religious surfers and there is a lack of awareness of the wealth of religious sites on the web. However, this is bound to change with an increase in the number of surfers of religious websites, as has been illustrated in the experience of Trinidadian religious users, quoted in Miller and Slater's book *The Internet*

I think the Internet is new. I think it's important to understand how it serves to highlight how sovereignly God can bring people, groups, organization and individuals together, without preconceived ideas... There is a text in scripture that says your gate shall be continually open. The way I interpret that is that the Internet is that always open gate. You don't have to service starting at 7, you just go on at anytime you want, anywhere in the world, any time of the day and you get across to what would be a service (2000:188).

Another issue connected with the potential advantage of the Internet, is its anonymity and the level of trust or distrust that it generates in the field of spiritual direction and counselling. Some are of the opinion that anonymity helps the client reveal personal and delicate issues, not easily done in a face-to-face contact. On the Internet, there can be a free flow of information on deep personal details of one's life. This aspect of anonymity did not surface in the research done in Mumbai, perhaps for the reason mentioned above, but would need to be explored as users begin to experiment with religious possibilities over the net. Miller and Slater point out this detail in their Caribbean research quoting a Catholic Priest's experience.

One of the old traditions of spiritual direction has been journal keeping. The journal has been a personal thing between the person and God.... What the Internet allows you to do is share that writing with someone who you are not seeing. It would be highly embarrassing for anyone to hand their journal over to another person if you were going to bump into them every day....But if they weren't going to bump into them everyday, it is easier; hand it over and let them read it and send it back if they trust that the information being received would not be misused. (2000:183)

This aspect of the anonymity of the Internet and its potential for religious use has yet to be explored in the context of net use in Mumbai.

An issue that is of concern to the Church, relating to its use of the Internet, is the so-called digital divide that exists among the users of the Internet. It has been pointed out

that, since the net favours the elite, who have access to the net, and, since the Church has generally identified itself with the less fortunate strata of society, it has not made an all-out effort to use the net for religion. The document 'The Church and the Internet' speaks of the right to information as a basic human right, and encourages people to engage in action that wipes out this digital divide. The data gathered in the research reveals that few Catholic net users in Mumbai, had views about the digital divide. The reason for this could be the fact that, for the most part, Catholics belong to the middle or lower income group, and identify themselves with the have-nots of society. The issue of the digital divide is real for them, and they are striving in their own lives not to be discriminated against. For this reason, they do not see the need for the Church to be over-involved in providing a service that, at the moment, caters only to the rich. More research needs to be done to explore this digital divide and its influence, both on the Church and its followers, in relationship to Internet usage for religion.

While religion, and the Catholic Church in particular, has a firm foothold on the Internet and is gaining net-surfing believers, in Mumbai the faith has yet to go online in a significant way. The Catholic Church has taken a significant stand to promote the Internet at the international level. At the local level, it needs to create greater awareness of the potential of the net, train its clergy in net use, and collaborate with the laity if it wishes to utilize the net for religion. The research undertaken provided new insights into the patterns of Internet usage of believers in Mumbai. It has also unearthed newer questions that need further research to enhance the use of the net by the Catholic Church, both in Mumbai and in the Asian context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Survey on Computer Mediated Communications (CMC) June 2000

1. Do you use computers? Yes ☐ No ☐
If yes Frequently ☐ Off and on ☐ Rarely ☐
2. Do you use computers at: Work At School/College ☐ At home ☐
3. How much time would you say you spend using computers?
Daily ☐ Less than an hour ☐ 2-3 hours ☐ 5 hours or more ☐
Weekly ☐ Less than an hour ☐ 2-3 hours ☐ 5 hours or more ☐
4. Please rank your use of computers according to the following scale:
1. Most Frequently 2. Very Often 3. Of and On 4. Rarely 5. Never
Mark a number as per above scale against each of the following purposes.
Seeking information/Studies..... Relaxation.....
Business..... Communications...
Religious..... Any Other purposes....
5. Could you specify what type of areas are explored in each of the areas stated above:
Information:
Historical ☐ Scientific ☐ Media ☐ Marketing ☐ Religion ☐ Other ☐
Relaxation:
Chatrooms ☐ Music ☐ Video ☐ Games ☐ Other/ Please specify ☐
Communication:
E-mail ☐ Discussion ☐ Video Conferencing ☐ Other/ Please specify ☐
Business:
Evaluation of goods & services ☐ Purchase of goods/services ☐ Other/Please specify ☐
Religious:
Information ☐ Queries ☐ Faith Sharing ☐ Inspiration ☐ Other/Specify ☐
Other:
6. a) Which websites do you surf for Information? Name three in order of preference.
1.
2.
3.
a) Which websites do you surf for Relaxation? Name three in order of preference.
1.
2.
3.
a) Which websites do you surf for Communication? Name three in order of preference.
1.
2.
3.
a) Which websites do you surf for Business? Name three in order of preference.
1.
2.
3.
a) Which websites do you surf for Religious purposes? Name three in order of preference.
1.
2.
3.

7. Of the four uses of computers listed below which do you use? Score in order of preference.

1. Most frequently 2. Very often 3. Off and on 4. Rarely 5. Never
E-mail ----- Chat Group ----- Listserve/Discussion ----- Websites -----

8. How did you come across the use of computers for religious purposes?

Casually ☐ Through friends ☐ Through religious group ☐ Through personal search ☐

9. For how long have you been using computers for religious purposes?

More than 3 years ☐ 1 year ☐ 6 months ☐ 3 months or less ☐

10. Do you feel computer mediated communications (has made any difference in the understanding and practice of your religion? Yes ☐ No ☐

How would you grade the difference?

Hardly any difference ☐ Slight difference ☐ Some difference ☐ Great difference ☐

11. Would you feel that computer mediated communications can help you in any of the following areas of your religious belief/practices?

Mark each item listed below with a number corresponding to your response.

- As a new expression of your religious life? _____
- As a means of building up your understanding of faith? _____
- As a means of linking with your religious community? _____
- As a means of discovering the meaning of your life? _____
- As a means of reaching out to others? _____
- As a means of renewing religious life? _____
- Any Other? _____

12. Do you feel that the use of computer mediated communications in understanding and sustaining religious belief/practices should be encouraged?

Select one number from those given below to indicate your response.

1. No ☐ 2. Maybe ☐ 3. Not sure ☐ 4. Yes ☐ 5. Definitely ☐

13. What do you feel the Church authorities should do about computer mediated communications?

Ban them ☐ Ignore them ☐ Use sparingly ☐ Tolerate them ☐ Encourage them ☐

14. Any other comments you would like to make by way of your personal feedback?

Some Personal Data

Male ☐ Female ☐ Married ☐ Single ☐
Age group: (Below 20) ☐ (21-35) ☐ (35 and above) ☐
Educational Qualifications: High School ☐ Graduate ☐ Post Graduate ☐
Religious Affiliation Catholic ☐ Protestant ☐ Other ☐
Status in Church: Priest ☐ Religious/Sister ☐ Lay person ☐
Membership Affiliation: Charismatic Group ☐ Non-Charismatic Group ☐
Any other data:

Appendix II

Survey on the possible uses of the Internet/E-mail for 'religious' purposes – March 2001

- 1. According to you, how can the Internet/E-mail be used in a way beneficial to religion?**

- 2. What are the ways in which the Internet/ E-mail is being used for religious purposes/practices?**

- 3. What types of Websites/E-mails would you consider religious? Why?**

- 4. What do you think is the policy/attitude of the Church with regard to the use of the Internet/E-mail for religious purposes? Why?**

- 5. Do you see the use of the Net/E-mail for religious purposes as a threat to the Church/ opportunity? Why?**

- 6. Do you feel that the Internet is being used more by the official Church or by the laity? Should it be so?**

- 7. There appear to be lot of E-mail and websites for religion put up by lay people. What could be the implications with regard to the role of the laity in the church?**

8. Do you see the use of E-mail and existing websites for religious purposes affecting the Church and its practice of the faith in any particular way?

9. Is there something that E-mails/religious websites offer that is missing in what traditional religion offers?

10. Are there any ways in which E-mails/religious websites are replacing or confronting traditional rituals, communities, sacred places, or religious teachings?

11. Which religious websites would you be likely to visit / avoid? Why?

12. Any other comment or observation you wish to make?

Some Personal Data

Please underline/tick/mark relevant items below:

Sex	Male	Female		
Marital Status	Married	Single		
Age Group	(Below 20)	(21-24)	(25-34)	(35and above)
Country	India	Bombay	Delhi	Other
	Other Country	Asian	Non Asian	
Computer User	Yes	Frequently	Rarely	Not at all
Computer Usage	At home	Cyber-Café	At School/College/At work	
Education Qualifications:	High-School	Graduate	Post Graduate	
Religious Affiliation:	Catholic	Protestant	Other	
Status in religion:		Priest	Religious/Sister	Lay Person
Membership/ Affiliation If applicable		Charismatic	Non-Charismatic	Other
Any other data:				

Appendix III

Focus Group Guide: Structuring the Time & Questions for the Focus groups

Introduction of the structure and purpose of the focus groups: 1-2 minutes

1. 10. minutes General Media Usage and habits -Warm up

- State your Name/ Parish you come from and what your occupation is
- Which different media you use on a frequent basis from most to least:
Eg: Newspaper/ Radio/ Walkman/ Cassette player/ Television/VCR/
Computer/Internet
- What different purposes do you use the internet for?

2 15 minutes - Usage of the Internet for religious purposes

- Have you used the Internet/Emails for religious purposes? How?
- Why have you used Internet and E-mails for religious purposes?
- Do you feel people are using/not using the Internet for religious purpose? Why?
- What different religious uses of the net are you aware of?
- What categories of people are you aware of who are using the Internet for religion?

3. 15 minutes Brief Presentation of some popular religious websites

Mention five or six popular websites hosted on the net(CD)

Let people choose which they want to see and to browse through

- Have you heard of or seen these websites before?
If yes, how did you become aware of it?
If no, what could be the possible reason for not knowing of it?
- Would you be interested in any of these websites? Why? Or Not why?

4. 20 Minutes If you were designing a religious website what would you put in?

What would you be looking for from a good religious website?

In terms of content:

Religious News and Information?

Religious Teaching and Doctrine?

Religious Study eg. Scripture/ Theology

Inspirational Matter /Any Other?

20 minutes If you were designing a religious website how would you present it?

What would you expect from a religious website in terms of presentation?

Attractiveness? Artistic and Creative?

Ease of use? User-friendly navigation

Interactivity and possible Interaction?

5. 15 Minutes Do you feel the Church Hierarchy/ Laity use the Internet for religion?

- If yes What strategy should be followed by whom? - If no why?

Would the use/ non-use of the Internet make a difference to the foll:

Church Communications?/Church Structure?/The role of the laity?

The role of youth/ The practice of faith?/-Any Other?

6. 5 minutes Wind up.

Appendix IV The Survey Questionnaire - Media Habits And Usage Project Information

1. I would now like you to answer a few questions on your media habits. By this I mean which media (TV, Newspapers, Magazines etc) have you used in the last one week. Circle the code at the side of each option.

TV	1
VCR	2
Radio	3
Cinema	4

Newspapers	5
Magazines	6
Internet	7
Others (Pl specify)	8

1 People watch TV, read newspapers etc, for different reasons. I would now like you to please mark the reason(s) why you used each medium that you have marked in the above question. *Please mark all the reasons applicable for each medium. Please circle the number corresponding to the relevant activity / medium. For ex. If you have watched TV for Work then code the number corresponding to TV row and Work column i.e 1*

	News /Info	Entertainment	Relaxation	Work	Business	Others
TV	1	1	1	1	1	1
VCR	2	2	2	2	2	2
Radio	3	3	3	3	3	3
Newspapers	4	4	4	4	4	4
Magazines	5	5	5	5	5	5
Internet	6	6	6	6	6	6
Cinema	7	7	7	7	7	7
Others (pl specify)	8	8	8	8	8	8
Others (pl specify)	9	9	9	9	9	9

2 I would now like to know when did you last use the Internet ?

Yesterday	1	Within the last 12 months	5
Within the last 7 days	2	Longer than 12 months ago	6
Within the last 4 weeks	3	Never	7
Within the last 3 months	4	Don't know	8

3 I would now like to know how many times in an average month do you use the Internet ?

Every day	1	Once every 2-3 weeks	5
5-6 times a week	2	Every 4 weeks	6
2-4 times a week	3	Less often	7
Once a week	4	Never do this nowadays	8

4 People use the internet for various purposes. I have listed down some of these purposes. (a) I would like you to let me know whether you have used the Internet for any of these purposes? (b) Secondly, I would like to know whether the clergy you know, use the Internet for any of these purposes.(c) Thirdly, I would also like you to let me know whether other people, the laity you know, have used the internet for any of these purposes? Please tick each of the columns according to the respective use

General Purposes	Myself	Others	
		Clergy	Laity
Relating to People/Keeping in touch			
Belonging to a group			
Getting specific Information			
For work purposes			
For study purposes			
For entertainment/relaxation			
For obtaining News and views			
For sharing information/messages			
For influencing others/creating public opinion			
For self improvement/for enhancing life			
For Other purposes (specify)			
Spiritual/Religious Purpose:			
For getting Religious News/Information			
For obtaining Teachings/answers/guidance			
For passing on Spiritual messages			
For intercession/Prayer needs			
For passing on chain prayers/messages			
For Study of Religious Books/Resources			
For Sunday Readings/Reflections Aids			
For Inspirational purposes			
For Sharing faith with others			
For belonging to a Faith Community			
For any other purposes: (Specify)			

5 Why do you use the Internet when traditional sources of religious practices are available?

Ease of access	1	Within my control	5
User-friendly nature	2	Inaccessible information/resources available	6
In keeping with my work and life style	3	Any Other	7
Pace of life/Time constraints	4		

6 What kind of religious content would you look for on the Web?

Religious News/Information	1	Study Material/ Courses on Religious Matters	5
Religious Teaching/Doctrine	2	Online Prayer/Meditation/Inspiration	6
Homily/Liturgical Aids	3	Some kind of approval rating for genuine religious website	7
Personal Experiences/Testimonies	4	Any Other	8

- 7 How would you prefer religious websites to present their content?

Appealing attractive and creative way: Colour/layout/Visuals	1
Blend of texts and visuals/ hotlinks	2
Ease of Movement through different pages/links	3
Popular style, readable, in non-religious jargon	4
Relating religious matters to current situations and daily life	5
Any Other	6

- 8 Which web characteristics would you desire to be included as part of religious websites?

Possibility of Interactivity	1
Space for Feedback/Public opinions	2
Forums/ Chat group	3

- 9 It is felt that the Net is not so well used for religious purposes. What could be the possible causes for the poor usage of the Net for religious purposes?

Lack of awareness of its possible uses on the net	1
Lack of awareness of actual religious websites	2
Their location on the net	3
Lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Clergy to promote religious websites	4
Financial and economic constraints in using the net for religious purposes	5
Lack of facilities/possibilities for religious usage in office/work situation	6
Traditional religious practices and habits	7
Lack of official publicity and promotion of the web for religious purposes	8
Any Other	9

- 10 If the Internet were well used for religious purposes what difference would it make to people's lives? To the Religious System?

Greater Interest in Spiritual Matters	1
Religion would be more related and connected with life and daily realities	2
People would participate in religion and religious matters on a regular basis	3
Religion instead of being peripheral would become more central to peoples lives	4
People would have a possibility to express their opinions in religious matters	5
More people would have the opportunity to satisfy their religious needs	6
Lay People would be more competent and well versed in religious matters	7
Youth would be interested and participate in religious activities on a regular basis	8
Use of the Internet would promote equal opportunities for all	9
Use of the Internet for religious purposes would not make any difference at all	10
Any other	11

11 In what way is the use of the Internet a threat to existing religious practices?

The net could become a substitute for actual religious practices	1
The net could challenge the teaching of religious authorities and the role of the clergy	2
The use of the net could lead to the dwindling number of people who practice their faith	3
The use of the net could lead people astray	4
The net could increase the divide between the haves and the have-nots	5
The net could seen as a tool of the elite	6
The net could add to confusion caused by inauthentic religious sources on the net	7
Any Other	8

13. Should the use of the Internet for religious purposes be exercised by the Laity or Clergy?

The clergy should use it more as they are not doing enough at the moment to promote it	1
The laity should use the net more as they are computer savvy and have more experience	2
The laity should use it more as it gives them the possibility to have their voice heard	3
Both groups should use it more as it will be mutually beneficial	4
Any Other	5

14. Would the Internet replace our links with communities we are part of or belong to?

If they join Internet communities people may give up existing communities	1
Belonging to an Internet community is less time consuming and hence preferable	2
Belonging to an Internet community is less risky and hence preferable	3
In the Internet community I am in control of my commitment and hence it is preferable	4
People will want to belong to Internet as well as traditional communities	5
People will never want to belong to Internet community as long as traditional ones exist	6
Any Other	7

Some Personal Data

Please underline/tick/mark relevant items below:

Gender:	Male	Female		
Marital Status	Married	Single		
Age Group	Below 20	21-24	25-34	35and above
Residence	Andheri	Bandra	Byculla	Colaba
	Thane	Vikhroli	Vashi	Other(Specify)
Computer User	Yes	Frequently	Rarely	Not at all
Computer Usage	At home	Cyber-Café	At work	At School/College
Education Qualifications:	High-School	Graduate	Post Graduate	
Religious Affiliation:	Catholic	Christian Denomination	Other	
Status in religion:	Priest/Cleric	Religious/Sister	Lay Person	Other
Membership/If applicable	Charismatic Group	Non-Charismatic Group		Other

Appendix v

Table 2

Question 2.1

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex		Age			Religious group				
	All	Male	Female	24<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	WRelig	Sem.
Total	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
News	69.1	67.6	70.6	61.5	69.8	73.4	66.3	71.2	85.7	63.2
Entertain	67.9	73.2	64.2	83.5	70.4	61.2	73.5	63.5	51.1	84.2
Relax	52.3	46.2	57.4	45.4	56.2	54.9	51.7	46.2	66.2	42.1
Work	6.7	5.69	7.8	5.3	6.5	7.9	5.4	1.9	15.0	5.3
Business	6.8	12.4	3.1	4.0	7.7	7.4	7.7	0.0	4.5	15.8
Others	4.13	7.69	1.4	4.8	5.9	7.7	6.3	0.0	9.0	5.3

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row all the figures are percentages in each group
- In the age groups the four classifications are 1. Below 24 years, 2. 25 to 34 years and 3. 35 and above.
- In the religious group the categories are 1. Laity, 2. Priests, 3. Women religious, 4. Seminarians

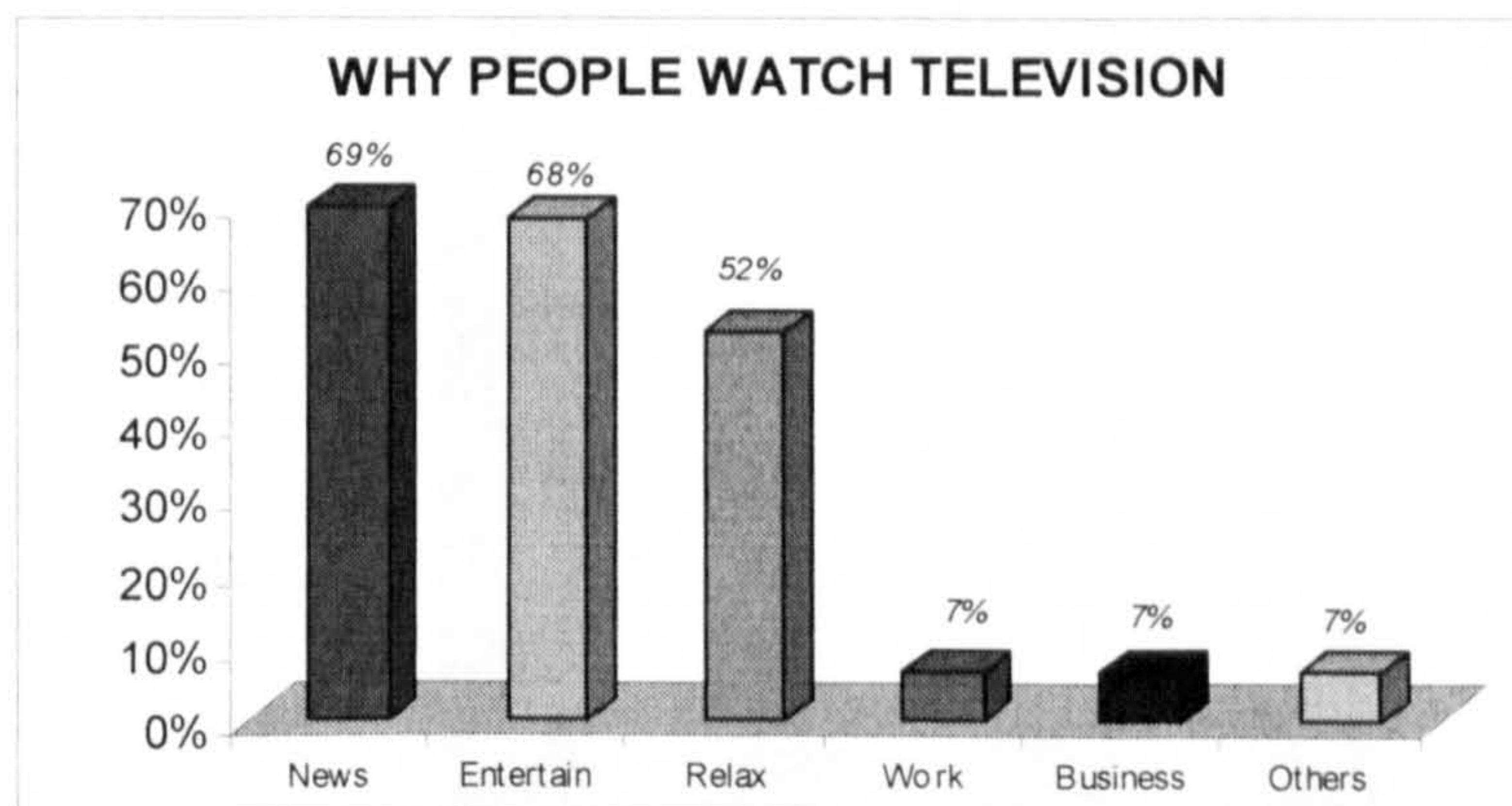


Chart 2. Why the respondents watch television

Appendix VI

Table 5

Question 2.4

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex			Age			Religious group			
	All	Males	Female	24&>	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
Total	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
News	76.8	74.2	79.1	76.1	75.7	79.2	74.6	84.6	85.7	73.7
Entertain	14.7	16.1	14.1	21.6	19.5	10.3	16.5	11.5	12.8	15.8
Relax	17.5	17.4	17.9	14.3	17.8	19.0	16.7	13.5	22.6	26.3
Work	22.1	22.4	22.4	18.4	23.7	23.7	23.3	15.4	23.3	15.8
Business	13.2	19.7	8.2	5.5	16.6	15.0	14.4	3.8	12.8	21.1
Others	9.2	10.0	8.7	7.1	7.1	11.3	10.2	5.8	9.8	5.3

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row all the figures are percentages in each respective group
- In the age groups the four classifications are (1). Below 24 years, (2). 25 to 34 years and (3). 35 and above.
- In the religious affiliation group the categories are (1). Laity, (2). Priests, (3). Women religious, (4). Seminarians

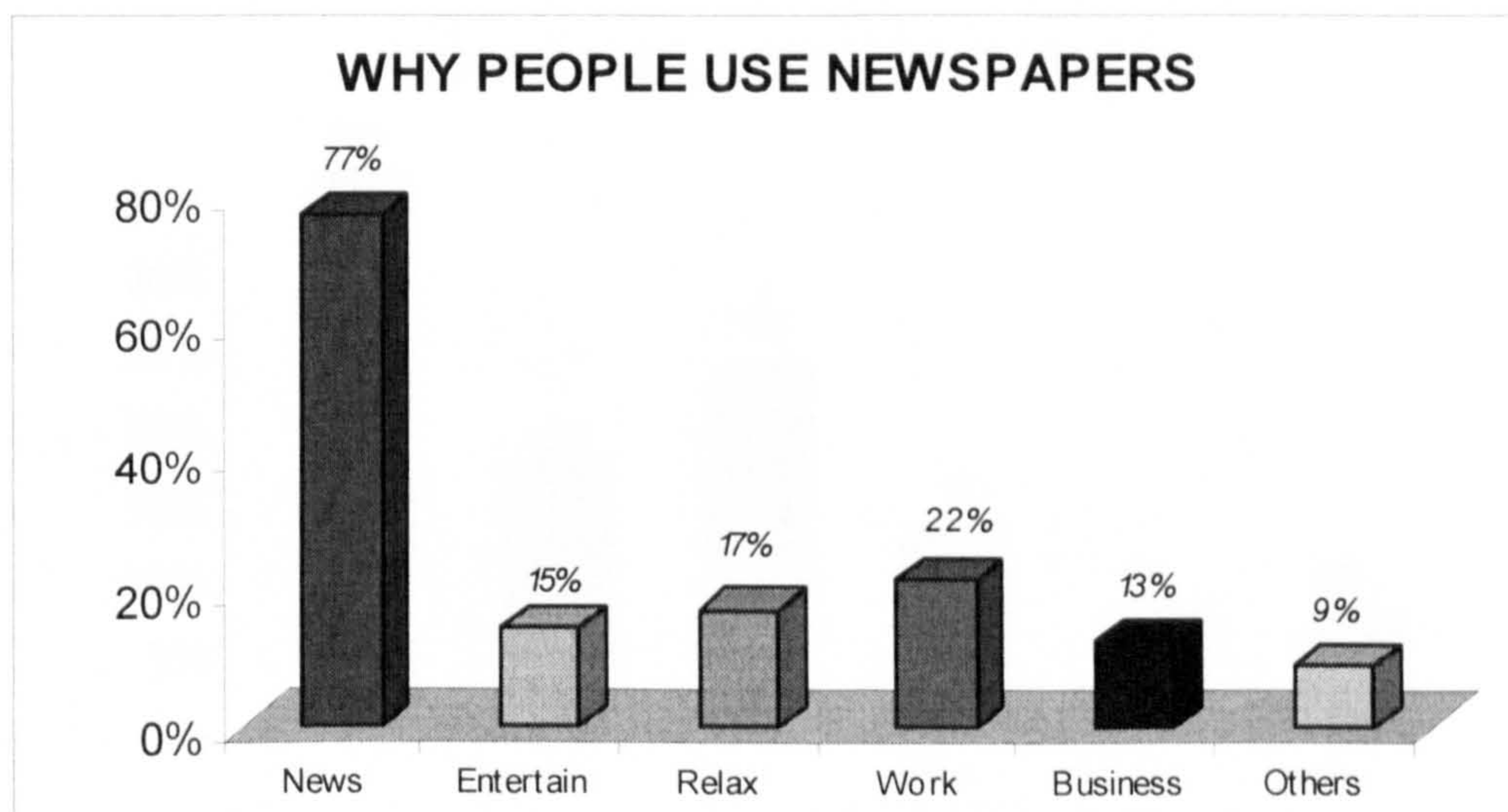


Chart 5. Why people read the newspapers

Table 6

Question 2.5

Quantitative Analysis

	Sex		Age			Religious group				
Group	All	Males	Female	24&>	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
Total	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
News	34.9	33.1	36.7	26.6	33.1	40.1	28.5	44.2	57.9	47.4
Entertain	15.7	14.0	17.2	22.1	13.6	14.0	17.3	7.7	14.3	10.5
Relax	22.3	20.4	23.8	18.0	22.5	24.5	19.4	21.2	33.1	36.8
Work	11.7	12.7	11.3	7.1	16.0	12.7	9.8	9.6	21.1	15.8
Business	6.1	7.7	4.5	3.6	7.7	6.9	6.9	1.9	5.3	10.5
Others	6.1	6.4	5.4	4.7	8.3	5.3	4.2	5.8	11.3	0.0

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row all the figures are percentages in each respective group
- In the age groups the four classifications are (1). Below 24 years, (2). 25 to 34 years and (3). 35 and above.
- In the religious affiliation group the categories are (1). Laity, (2). Priests, (3). Women religious, (4). Seminarians

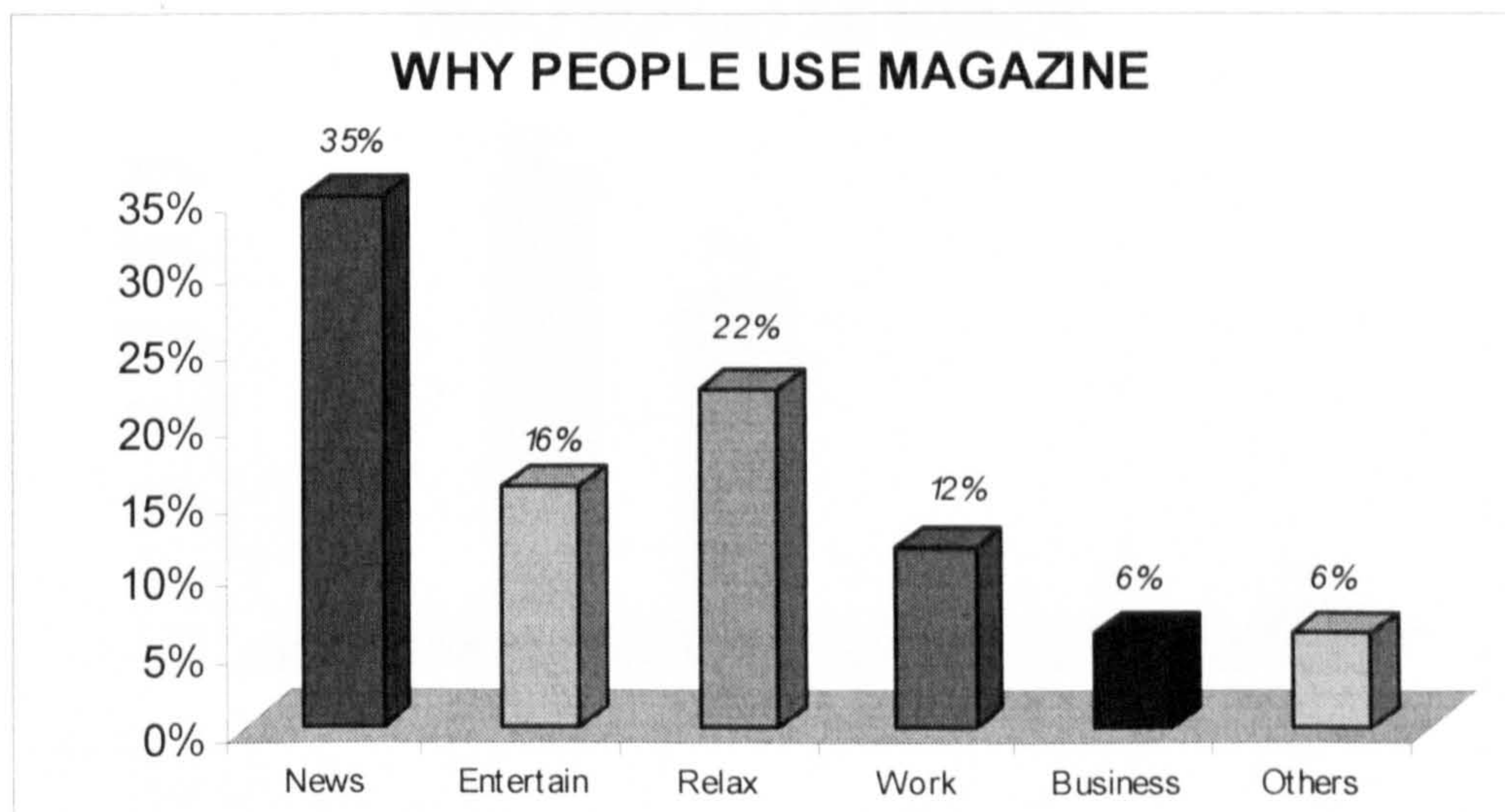


Chart 6. Why respondents use magazines

Appendix VIII

Table 4

Question 2.3

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex			Age			Religious group			Sem
	All	Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	
Total	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
News	46.4	16.7	69.6	13.0	19.5	14.2	11.9	25.0	19.5	52.6
Entertain	50.0	34.1	63.3	53.5	34.9	16.6	34.2	21.2	12.8	47.4
Relax	43.7	27.8	56.9	38.4	23.7	13.2	22.5	25.0	10.5	57.9
Work	2.1	2.7	1.9	2.4	3.6	1.6	2.1	0.0	4.5	0.0
Business	1.1	1.3	0.9	0.0	3.6	0.5	1.0	0.0	0.8	10.5
Others	2.1	1.7	2.6	1.8	4.1	1.6	1.7	0.0	6.0	0.0

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row all the figures are percentages in each respective group
- In the age groups the four classifications are (1). Below 24 years, (2).25 to 34 years and (3). 35 and above.
- In the religious affiliation group the categories are (1). Laity, (2). Priests, (3). Women religious, (4). Seminarians

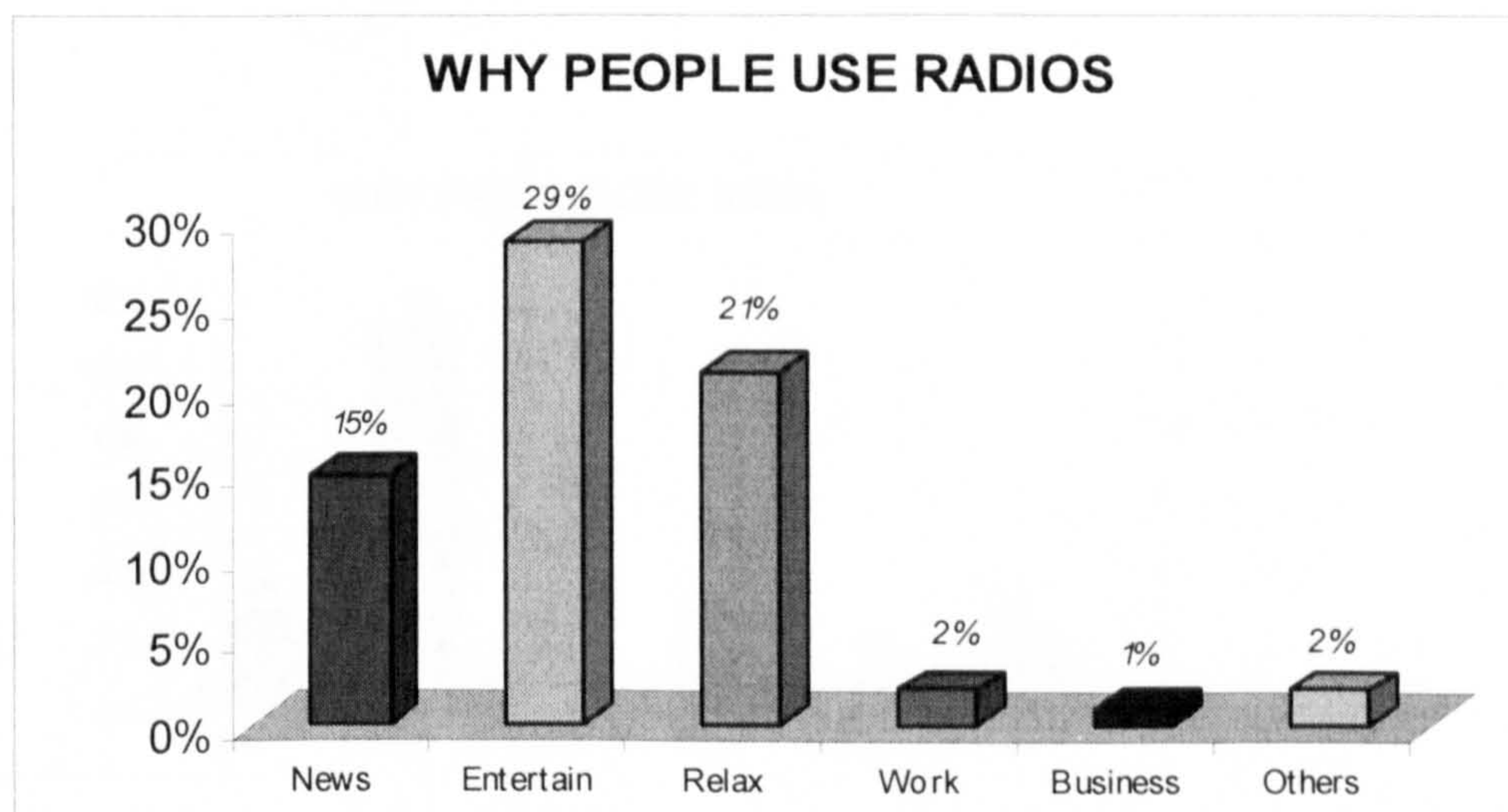


Chart 4. Why respondents used radios

Appendix IX

Table 3

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex			Age			Religious group			
	All	Males	Female	24<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
Total	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
News	2%	1.7	2.4	1.7	3.0	1.8	1.0	1.9	6.0	5.3
Entertain	11%	11.4	10.4	11.9	13.0	9.8	10.4	5.8	16.5	15.8
Relax	5%	5.4	4.5	5.9	6.5	3.7	3.5	5.8	9.8	10.5
Work	3%	2.0	3.3	1.7	3.0	3.2	1.5	1.9	8.3	5.3
Business	0%	1.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.5	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Others	1%	2.0	1.2	1.7	1.8	1.1	1.0	1.9	3.0	0.0

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row all the figures are percentages in each respective group
- In the age groups the four classifications are (1). Below 24 years, (2). 25 to 34 years and (3). 35 and above.
- In the religious affiliation group the categories are (1). Laity, (2). Priests, (3). Women religious, (4). Seminarians

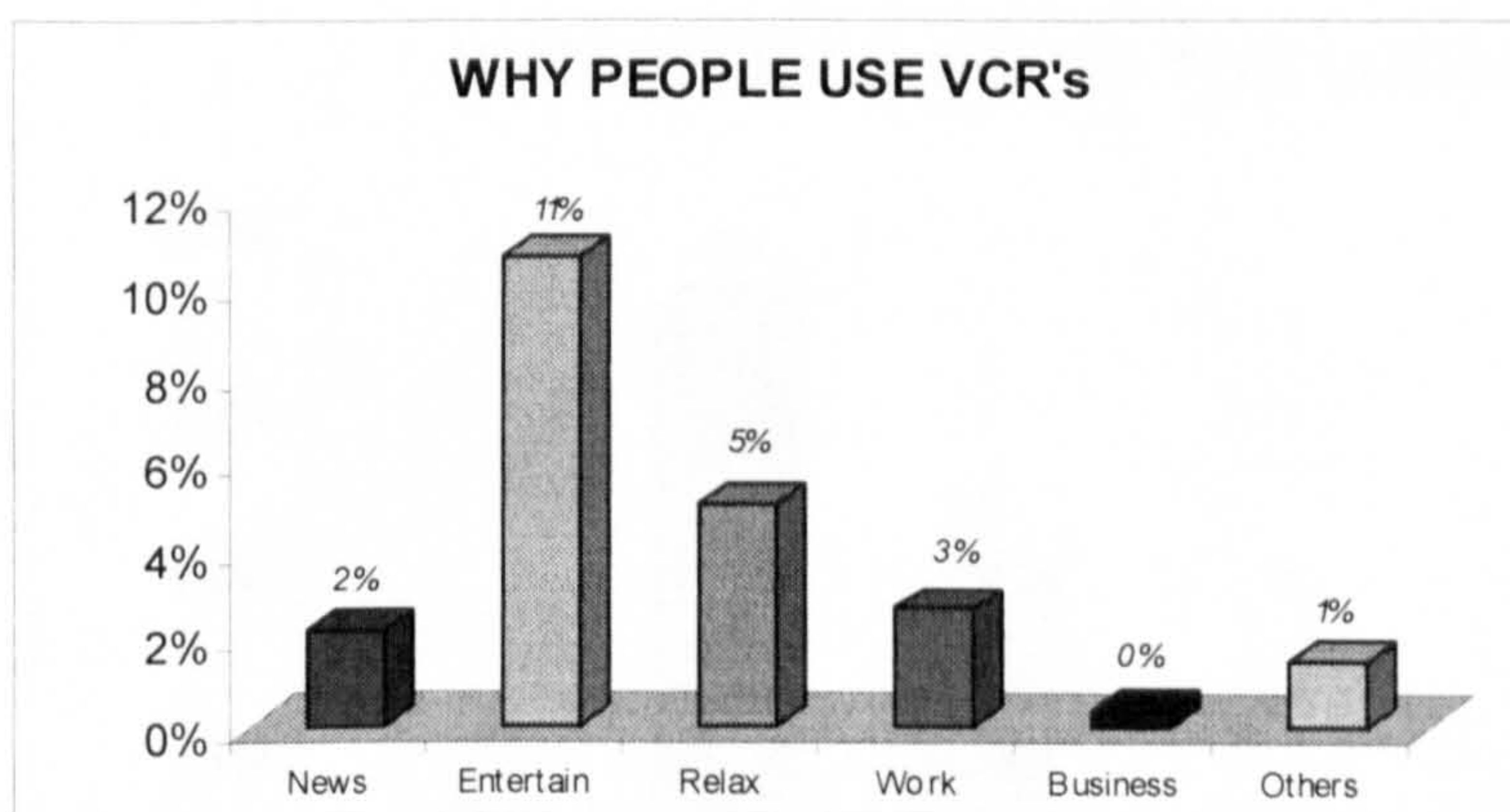


Chart 3. Why respondents use VCRs

Append. X
Table 7

Question 2.7

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex			Age			Religious group			
	All	Males	Female	24&<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
Total Users	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
News	0.9	0.7	1.2	3.5	1.2	0.5	0.8	1.9	1.5	0.0
Entertain	17.3	19.4	16.2	24.4	17.2	13.2	19.0	9.6	13.5	10.5
Relax	9.2	9.4	9.2	15.1	10.7	7.1	10.4	5.8	8.3	5.3
Work	0.7	1.0	0.5	2.3	1.2	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Business	0.5	1.0	0.2	2.3	0.0	0.5	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Others	0.4	0.7	0.2	3.5	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row all the figures are percentages in each respective group
- In the age groups the four classifications are (1). Below 24 years, (2). 25 to 34 years and (3). 35 and above.
- In the religious affiliation group the categories are (1). Laity, (2). Priests, (3). Women religious, (4). Seminarians

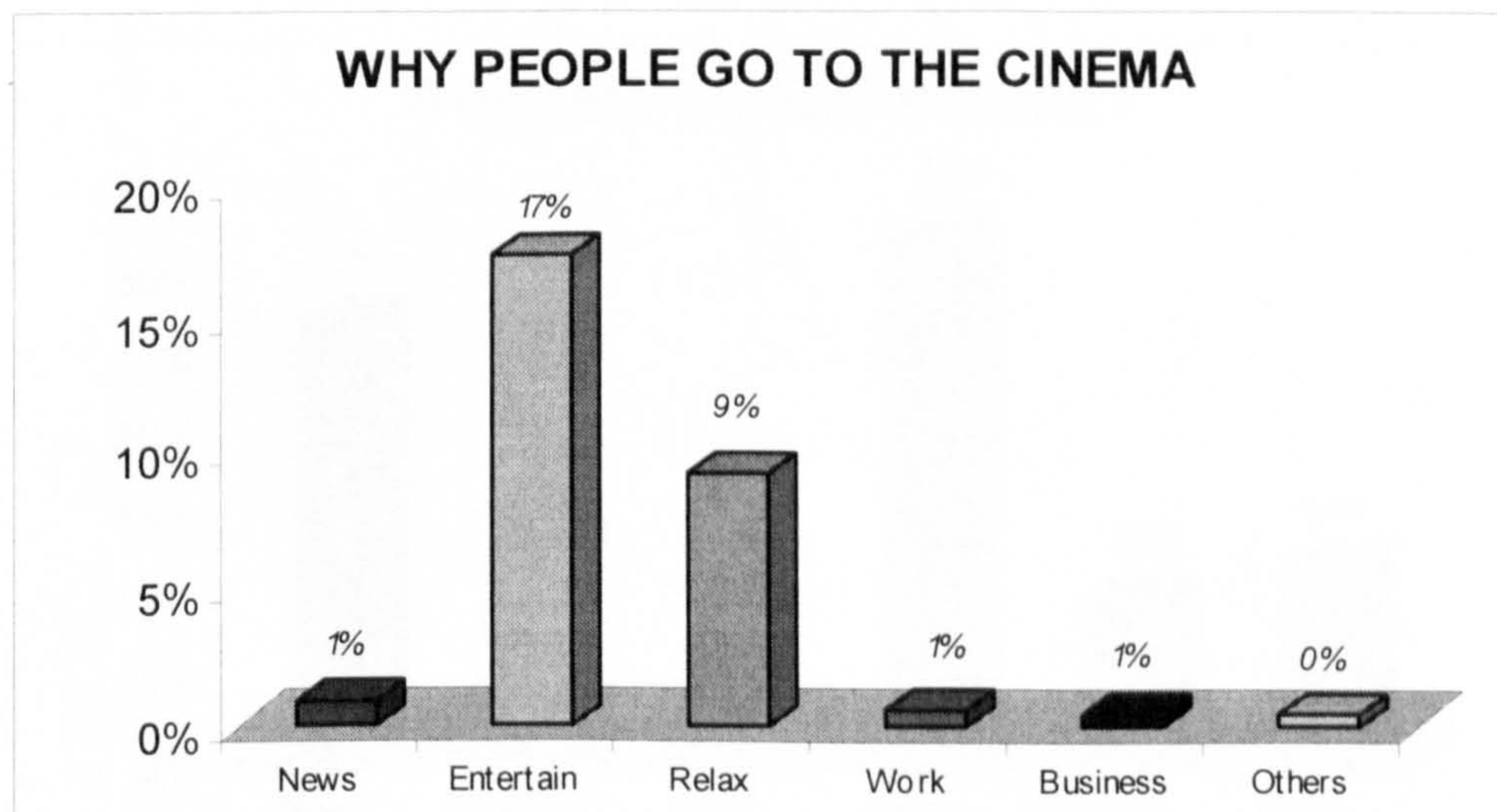


Chart 7. Why respondents go to the cinema

Append. XI

Table 8

Question 2.6

Quantitative Analysis

Group	Sex			Religious group						
	All	Males	Female	24<	25/34	35>	Laity	Priests	W.Relig	Sem.
Total Users	750	299	425	167	169	379	480	52	133	19
News	26.9	30.8	24.9	23.2	30.2	23.7	27.7	38.5	15.8	52.6
Entertain	15.3	21.7	10.8	36.7	15.4	6.6	19.8	5.8	3.8	15.8
Relax	9.2	12.4	7.1	15.4	10.7	6.1	10.8	9.6	3.8	21.1
Work	31.7	37.5	28.7	42.1	40.8	24.3	34.8	40.4	15.0	52.6
Business	9.7	14.4	6.4	6.4	14.2	9.5	10.8	11.5	6.8	15.8
Others	11.7	15.7	9.6	10.8	18.3	10.3	12.7	19.2	5.3	15.8

Table Key:

- Except for the Total row all the figures are percentages in each respective group
- In the age groups the four classifications are (1). Below 24 years, (2). 25 to 34 years and (3). 35 and above.
- In the religious affiliation group the categories are (1). Laity, (2). Priests, (3). Women religious, (4). Seminarians

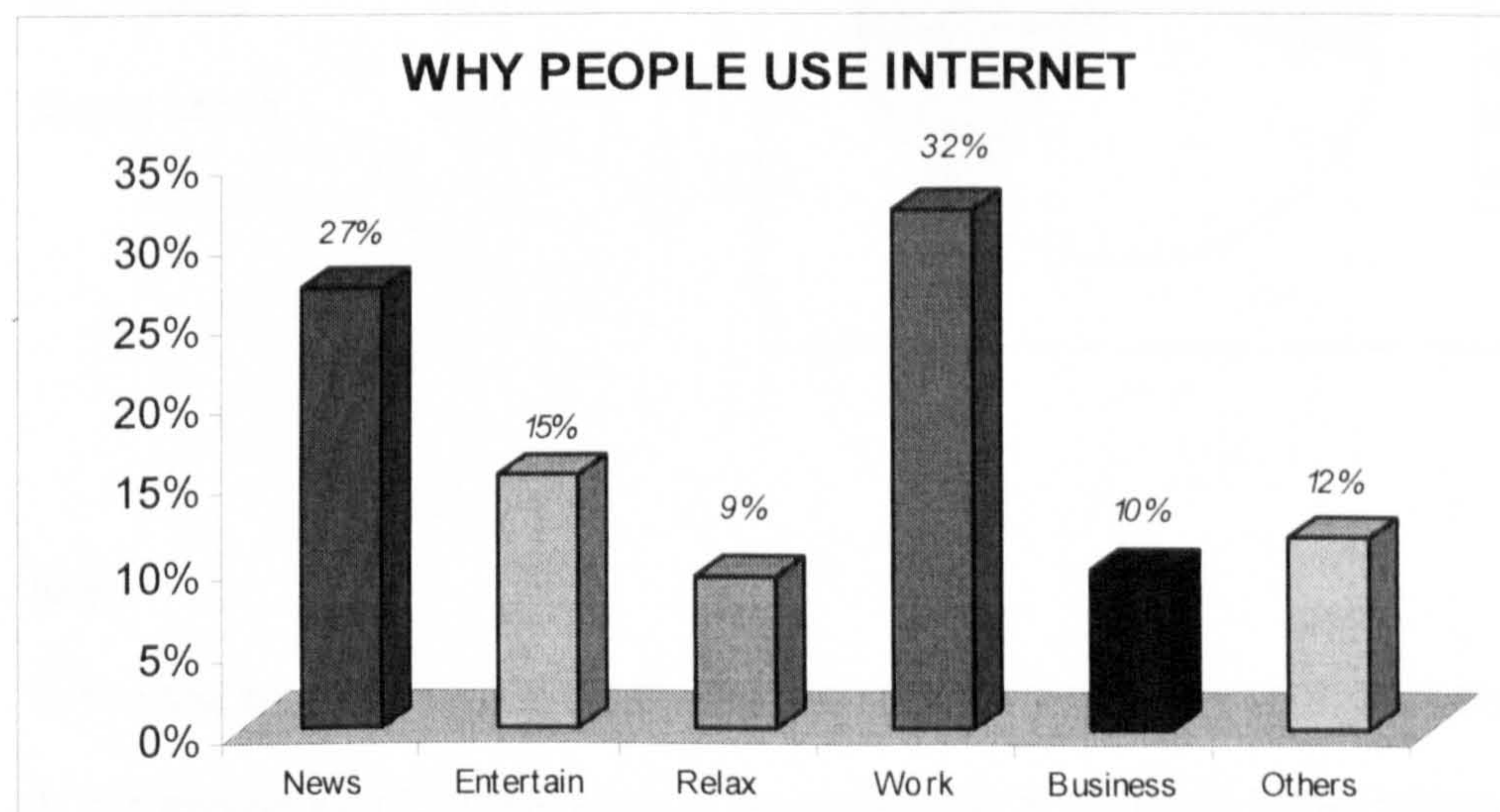


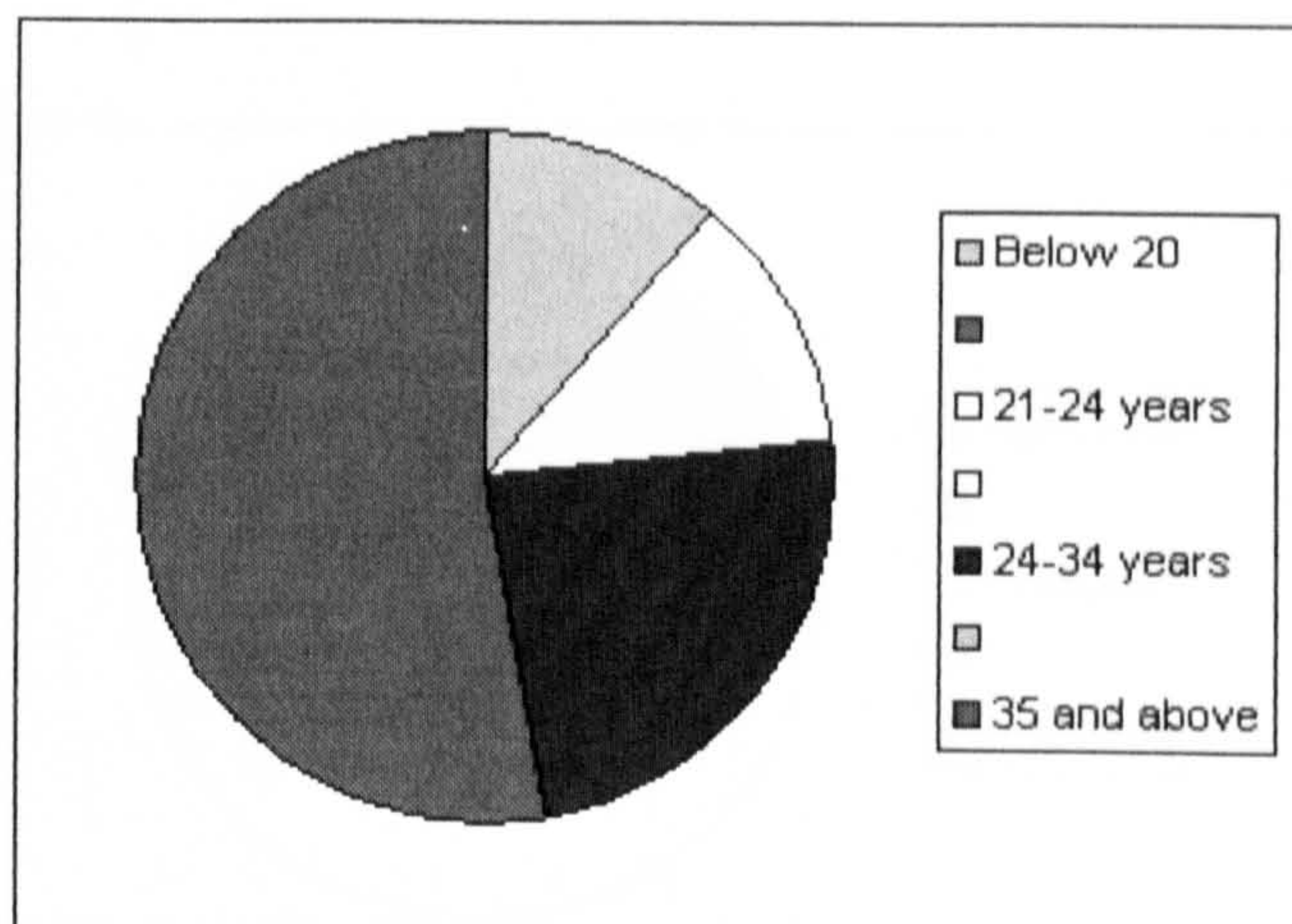
Chart 8. Why respondents use the Internet

Appendix XII Profile of Respondents of the Survey Questionnaire according to: age, and net usage

Figure 1

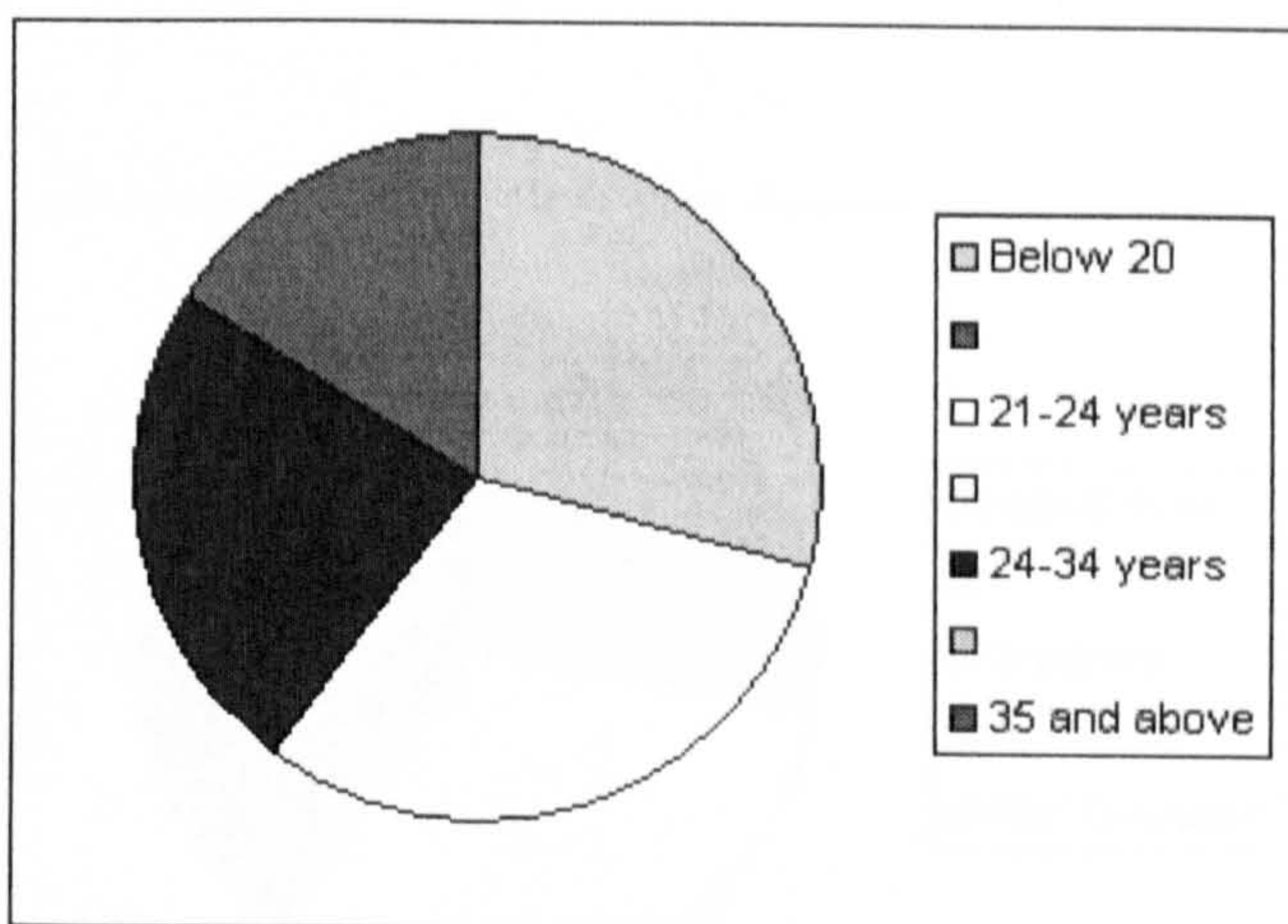
Age Classification

Below 20	10.8
21-24 years	11.5
24-34 years	22.5
35 and above	50.5



Age Classification Using Net

Below 20	65.4
21-24 years	68.6
24-34 years	53.3
35 and above	36.1



Key

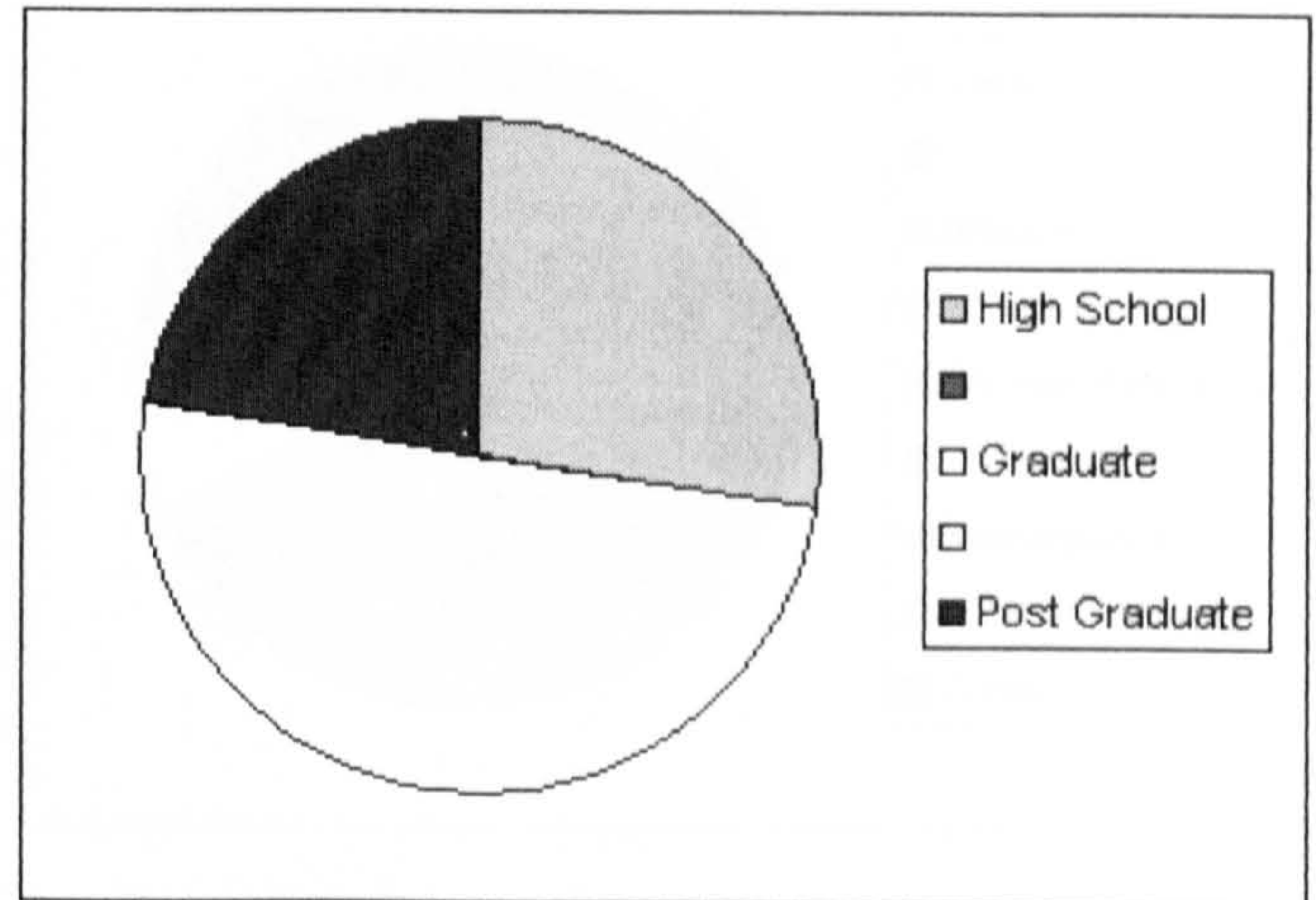
1. The first set of figures refer to the percentages of the respective age category
2. The second set of figures refers to the percentage of net users in that category

Profile of Respondents of the Survey Questionnaire according to education, and computer use

Figure 2.

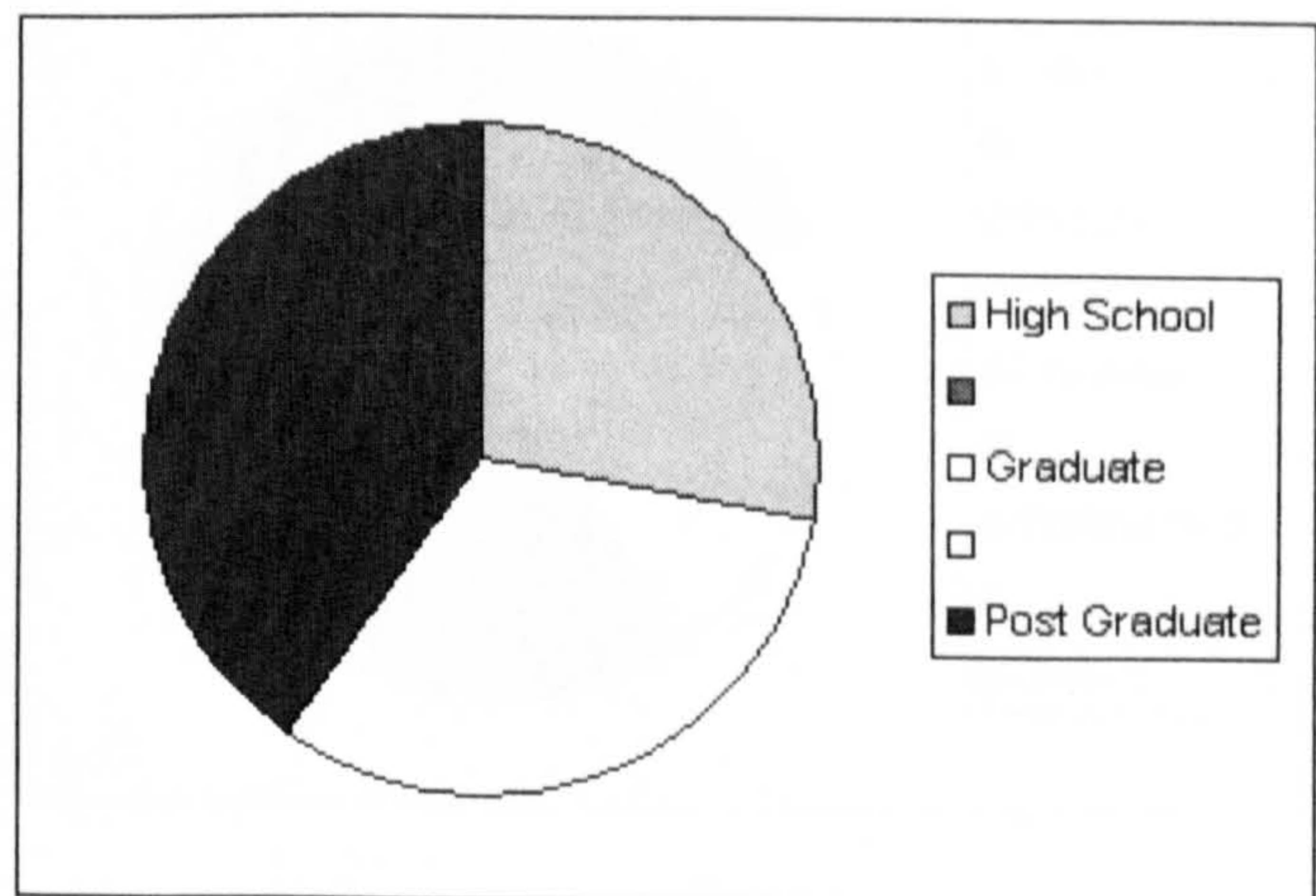
Education Classification

High School	25.5
Graduate	46.7
Post Graduate	20.8



Education Classification Using Net

High School	40.8
Graduate	47.1
Post Graduate	59



Key

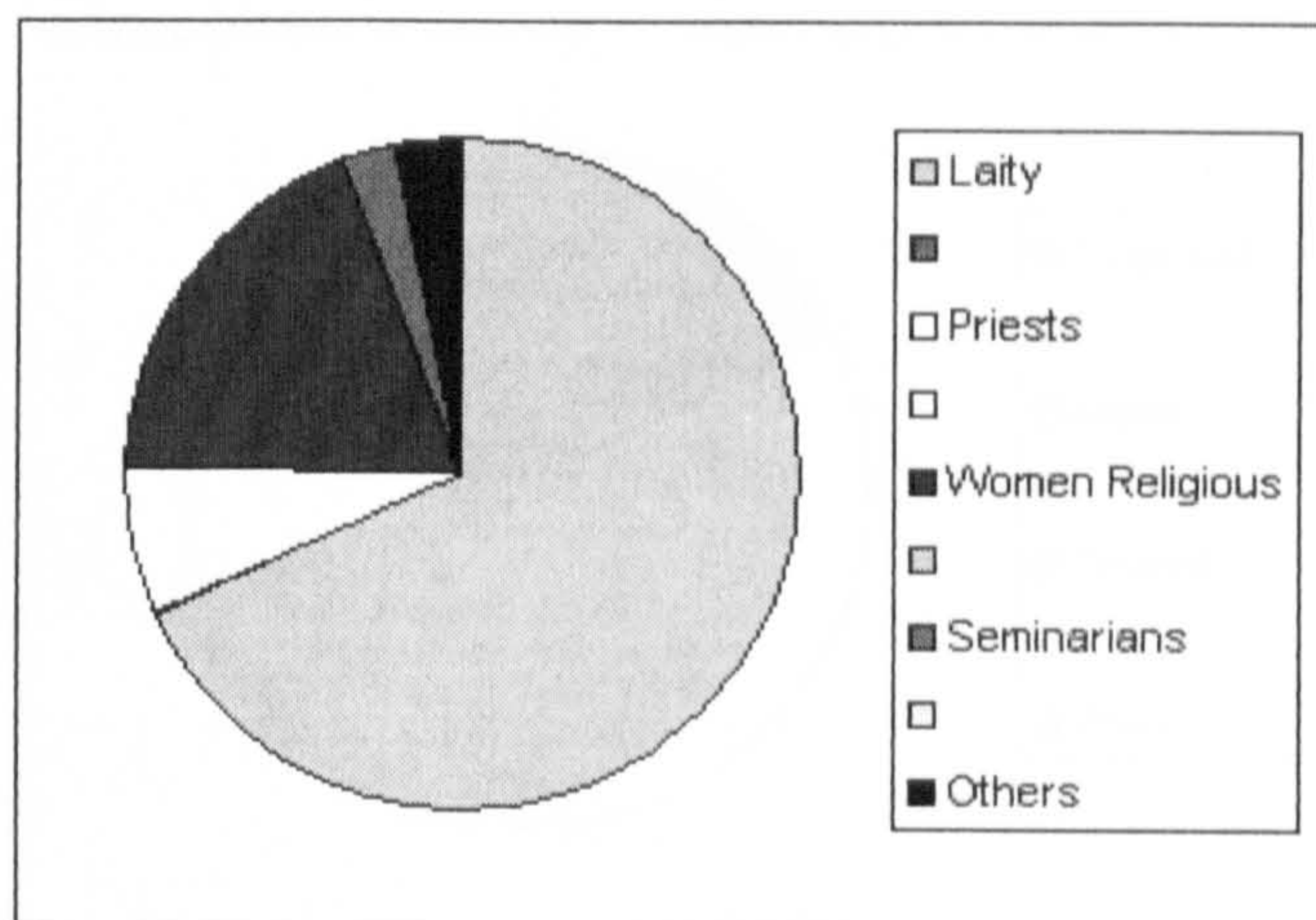
1. The first set of figures refer to the percentages of the respective age category
2. The second set of figures refers to the percentage of net users in that category

Profile of Respondents of the Survey Questionnaire according to religious affiliation and computer use

Figure 3

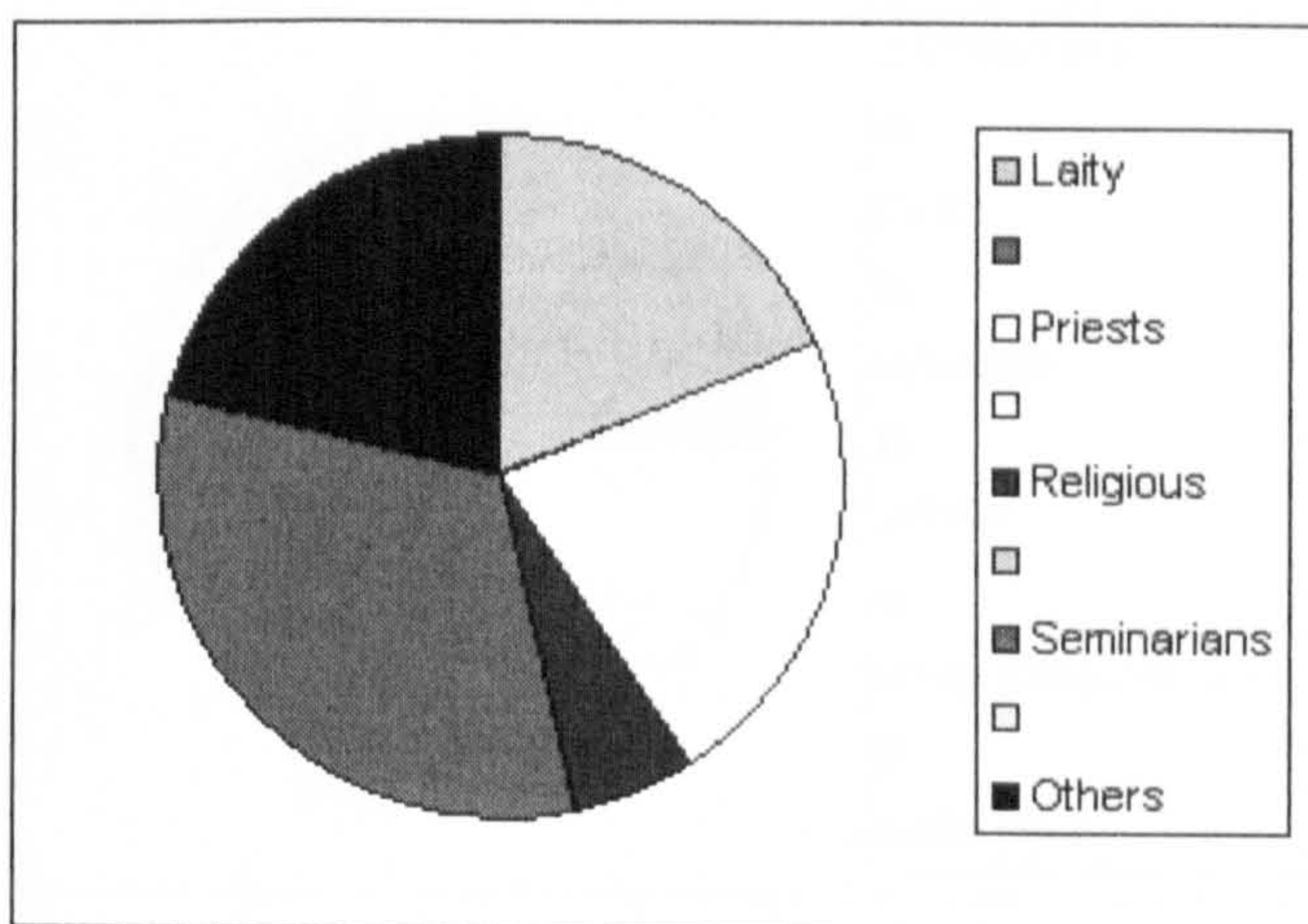
Religious affiliation:

Laity	64.0
Priests	6.9
Women Religious	17.7
Seminarians	2.5



Religious affiliation: Using Net

Laity	51.3
Priests	61.5
Religious	15.8
Seminarians	89.5



Key

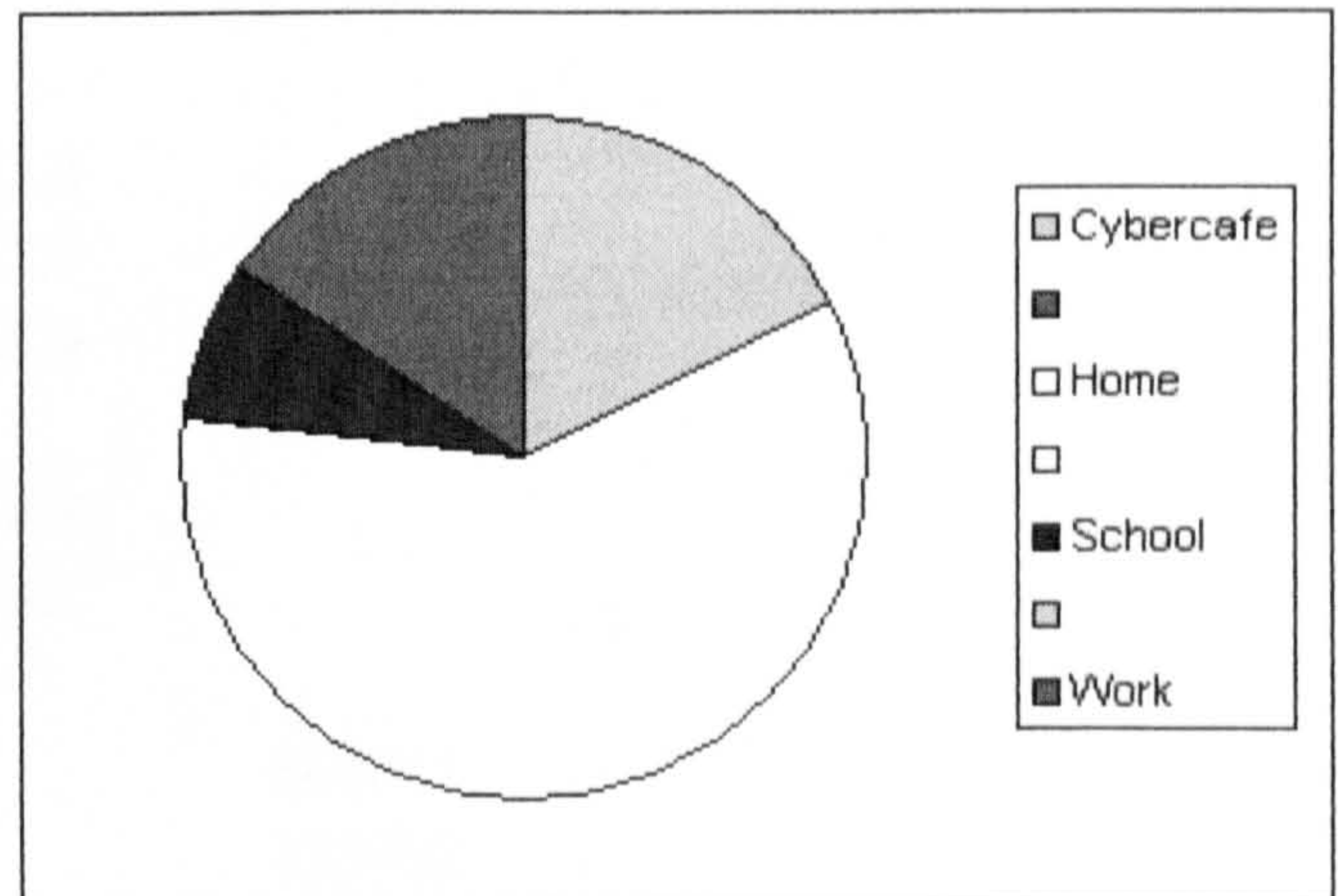
1. The first set of figures refer to the percentages of the respective age category
2. The second set of figures refers to the percentage of net users in that category

Profile of Respondents of the Survey Questionnaire according to place of computer use

Figure 4

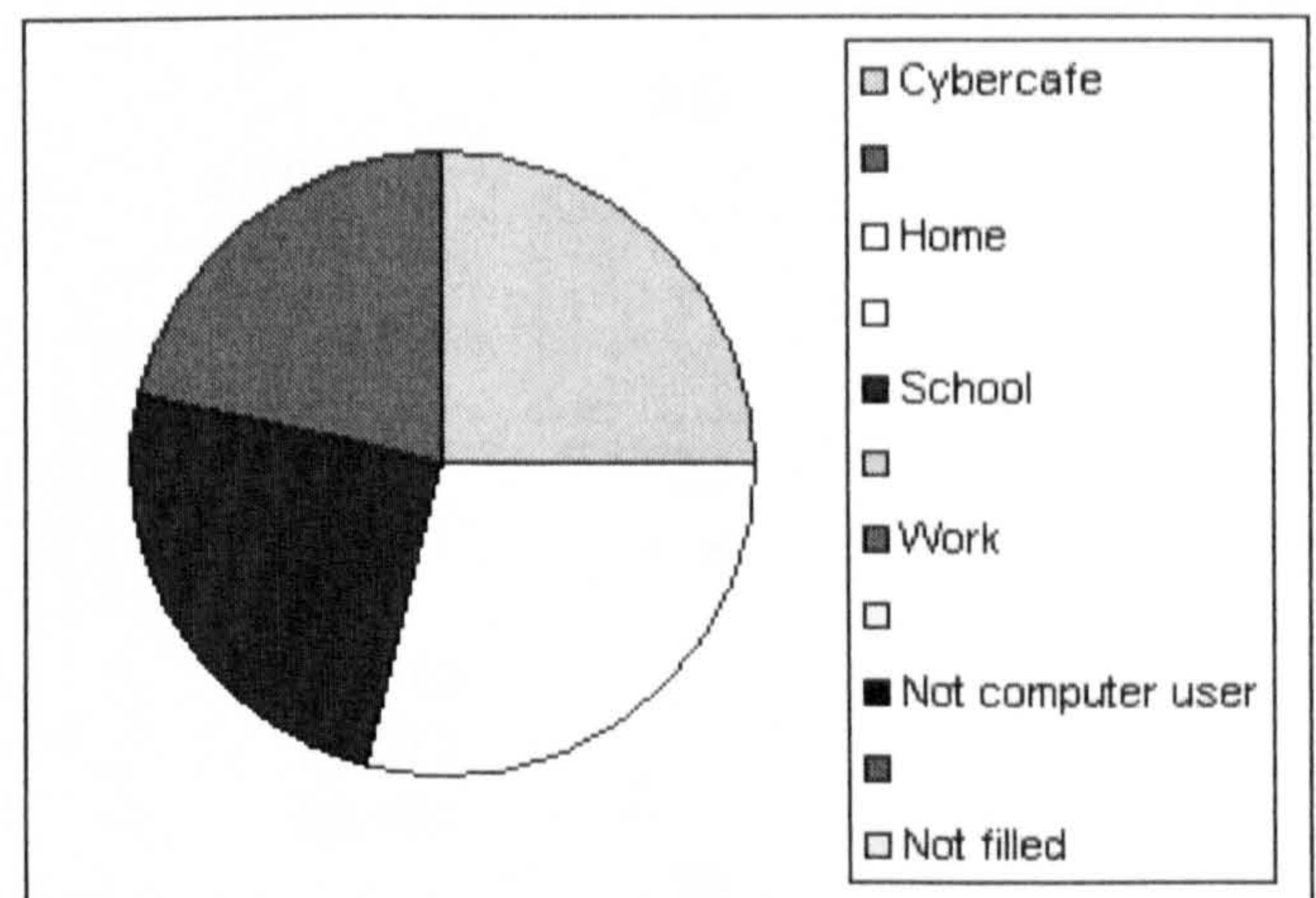
Location of net usage

Cyber-cafe	12.9
Home	42.9
School	5.5
Work	11.3



Using Net

Cyber-cafe	56.7
Home	64.9
School	56.1
Work	48



Key

1. The first set of figures refer to the percentages of the respective age category
2. The second set of figures refers to the percentage of net users in that category

Appendix XIII**India Fact File****Demographics of Population**

Year	Percent	Total million	Per 1000
1975		620.7	
1998		982.2	
2001		1037	

Urban Population

1975	21.3
1998	27.7
2015 Predicted	35.9

Population over 65

1998	4.8
2015 Predicted	6.4

Literacy

2002	Primary Schools	664041
2002	Higher Secondary	133492
2002	Colleges	8737
2002	Universities	351

Health

2001	Doctors per 10,000	5.6
2001	Affected with Aids	4,100,100

Access to information

1997	Radios sets	116
1997	TV sets	63
1998	Telephones	22
1998	Public Telephones	4
1998	Cell Phones	1
2000	Internet Serv.providers	43
2002	Internet hosts	86,871
2003	Internet users	18.481
2003	Telephones	70
2003	Telephone lines	48.917
2003	Mobile Telephones	26,154,400

Source:

<http://www.censusindia.net/>

http://www.appliedlanguage.com/country_guides/india_country_communications.shtml

http://www.indianchild.com/mobile_phone_manufacturers.htm

Appendix XIV

Religious Demography of India

1997	Percent	In Millions
Hinduism	82	687.6
Islam	12.1	101.5
Buddhists	0.8	
Jains	0.4	
Sikhism	1.9	16.3
Christians		19.6
Jews		
Zoroastrians		

Catholicism In India

Trend/Influence	Year		Responsible	Area of Work
Oriental Tradition- Apostolic Tradition	52 AD	Apostle	St. Thomas	Persia/South India
	AD	Apostle	St. Bartholomew	West Coast
Western Influence	1542-52	Missionary	St. Francis Xavier	West Coast
Christianity Inculturated	-1656	Missionary	Robert De Nobili	South India
	-1693	Missionary	John De Britto	Madurai Missions
	-1742	Missionary	Joseph Beschi	Madurai Missions
Christianity for tribals	1885	Missionary	Fr.C. Lievens	Ranchi Missions
Catholics	1998	10,210,000		

Source:

http://www.indianchild.com/india_religion.htm

Soares A. (1965) Catholicism in India

CBCI Directory 1998